

Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D. D.

<u>Year: 1972</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
January 2	"In A Death So Noble"	Deut. 34:4
January 9	"The Hiddenness Of God"	Isaiah 45:15
January 16	Communion Meditation	
January 30	"To Keep A Vow"	Psalms 116:14
February 6	"The Stranger At The Door"	Revelation 3:20
February 13	"The Right Sort Of Crucifix"	Colossians 2:14-15
February 20	"Those Deadly Sins - Pride"	Proverbs 29:23
February 27	"Those Deadly Sins -Avarice"	Timothy
March 5	"Those Deadly Sins - Lust"	Romans 13:13-14
March 12	"Those Deadly Sins - Anger"	
March 19	"Those Deadly Sins - Envy"	
April 2	"Somebody Cares"	
April 16	"Like A Lost Sheep"	Psalms 139
April 23	"To Make The Effort"	John 14:6
April 30	"Through The Eyes Of God"	
May 7	"Modern Man's Dilemma"	Jeremiah 10
May 14	"What Makes A Home Christian"	Luke 2:52
May 21	"Promises, Promises"	
May 28	"No Strings Attached"	
June 4	"No Other Gods--"	Exodus 20

1972- continued

SERMON TITLE

TEXT

June 11	"Perfect People"	Matthew 5:48
June 18	"The Christian Technique"	Mark 3:23
July 16	"How To Face A Problem"	Mark 8:5
July 23	"Not Everyone"	Matthew 7:21
July 30	"Like An Old Man Running"	Luke 15: 11-32
August 6	"To A High Mountain Apart"	Matthew 17: 1-9
August 13	"Two Men At Prayer"	Luke 18: 9-14
August 20	"When Life Turns Robber"	Judges 18:24
August 27	"Random Thoughts On A Parable"	Luke 10: 23-37
September 3	"A Job Well Done"	Matthew 6:24
October 1	Communion Meditation	
October 8	"As Links In The Chain"	Isaiah 45:5
October 22	"To Learn To Love"	John 15:12
October 29	Reformation Day	
MISSING November 5	"Unto The Upright"	Matthew 4:19-20
MISSING November 12	Stewardship Sermon	
MISSING November 19	"New Translation"	II Timothy 2:8
MISSING November 23	Thanksgiving Day	
MISSING November 26	"Where Are You, God?"	Matthew 25
MISSING December 3	Communion Meditation	
MISSING December 10	"The Book Of Life"	Romans 15:4

1972- continued

SERMON TITLE

TEXT

~~MISSING~~ December 17

~~Christmas Is God's Better Idea"~~

Judges 13:8

~~MISSING~~ December 24

"Was This Risk Necessary?"

January 2, 1972

"IN A DEATH SO NOBLE"

Make us honest enough, O God, to admit that the voice to be heard remains a frail, feeble echo of Your voice, and that those who hear may not be as sensitive to the truth as they would like to be. Nonetheless, give us together, mercifully, preacher and congregation alike, that being cleansed by Your grace, the time that we now spend together may remain to Your honor and glory, and perchance to our good. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The text that you are about to hear shortly deals with a disappointing fact in life. Once you've either read it or heard it, it could prove itself a real shocker. That this should and could be your experience, let me prepare you for it, first by sharing with you some prefatory statements.

I want to talk with you about the man involved: he was a good man, and he was a grand man. In fact, I'm willing to agree with those who maintain that of all the Old Testament characters, none can be classified as greater than he....

...he was chosen deliberately by God for a particular assignment. He wasn't so sure that he could agree with God's judgment -- for at first he responded rather reluctantly, and he gave God reasons why he believed that God should look for somebody else. But he was unable to convince God, and God still claimed him as His man....

For forty years he was the leader of a certain group of people. It was no easy assignment. Time and time again they rebelled, and by the time they came to the end of their journey, most of them had passed away, either be-

cause they were worn out, or they had lost the dream, or they had become unfaithful in the process. Still he remained as their leader.

Now after forty years, earnestly following the assignment given to him, he comes to what looks like the grasp of all those years' earnings. He is, if you please, now brought to the edge of the Promised Land, and God Himself puts him down in front of it, and God Himself says, "There it is!"

...so God speaks to Moses.

And the text -- the 4th verse of the 34th chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy....a disappointing text, and if you please, for some of you a real shocker. God speaks to His leader, to a leader of forty years:

"Moses, I have caused you to see it with your eyes,
but you shan't go over."

Little did my Sunday School teacher of years gone by, now of blessed memory, realize in what a predicament she put me when she introduced me to this part of the life of Moses. She told me that God had brought Moses to this point and then God had said to him, "You can't go over" -- because God was punishing him. I found myself in this very peculiar situation, my choice was a very simple one: I either was going to get mad at her for introducing me to this facet of God's nature that I didn't want to accept, or I found myself getting mad at God for being the kind of a God who would keep a man in tow for four decades, and now bring him to within grasp of what he himself had longed for....and then God say to him, "I'm asking for your resignation -- your service is now terminated. There is to be first in command -- I've already chosen him....he is, as of tomorrow, Joshua takes over."

I want to deal now with twin truths. Neither one, I dare say, you'll like.....

One is, it could be, as the Bible itself puts it, that God was balancing the books with Moses, that along the line Moses had provenh himself unfaithful, that along the line Moses deliberately had indicated his lack of belief and trust in God. And there are those who tell us that God eventually balances the books, God eventually gets even with those who don't measure up as He knows they could measure up, and who don't do what He knows they ought to have done.

That's an oldfashioned way of looking at life, and I would suggest maybe an old-fashioned way of thinking of God. But you can't go through the Bible with scissors in hand and cut out verses of Scripture that you don't like. The verse of Scripture remains. And there are other references to it in the Old Testament, that God brought Moses this far, as far as He did, and said, "No farther, Moses!"

....because Moses had disobeyed, because Moses had shown himself an impatient person.

And not only that, there are those who maintain that God treated Moses the way He did because Moses himself had been caught up with the sins of his people, and even a leader has to pay the price of involvement and relationship with unwilling servants of the Lord.

You may not like to think that this is true. And yet a cold, realistic reading of life itself maintains that every now and then there is evidence that warrants our accepting the fact that we never quite have done with the mistakes of the past. Or if we don't others don't. I'm wondering which is the greater tragedy, that we ourselves should limp along through life, delayed, deterred, because of some error of the past, of which we ourselves are quite aware.....or because we would be handicapped, remorseful as we are, because other people will never have done with our past. God Himself

knows how many people could redeem the situation if only they would, if it were not for the fact that other people won't forget. And this is one of the damnable aspects of life in our relationship with other people -- the people who refuse to believe that some people could benefit through their remorse, because of some indiscretion, because of some moment of weakness.

That you might receive it precisely, let me read it for you -- it's an account of one preacher's relationship with a parishioner. She was a university student, and she came and she said to her pastor: "The terrible thing about life to me is, mistakes and failures are never forgiven."

...said the preacher, "I asked her what she meant."

..."she said, 'Well, I mean this: if you take a wrong turn in life, you can never go back to where you were and take the right one. Your life is ever after determined by that false move. If you fail in some task in responsibility, you are ever afterward the person who failed in that task of responsibility. And the opportunity will never come again, and you and others must bear the consequences....' 'If you sin,' she went on to say, 'you can not go back and not sin at that particular point. All your subsequent life has to be determined in some degree by that failure....

'And,' she added, 'since we all make mistakes, and since we all take the wrong turn and since we all do disloyal things, since we all fail to realize our ambitions, the world for all of us is just a colossal might-have-been -- an irredeemable, third-rate ruin of a place -- a graveyard of dead and unresurrectable desires . . . '"

...to think that one so young should speak so cynically. Yet there is evidence to admit that this is true for some people. Things never again can be as was. No situation ever remains as it was. The present and the future is always

being shaped by the past. Oh, let it be clearly understood, God forgives the sinner. There should be no question about that -- God cleanses the heart, God removes the iniquity. But even God Himself cannot take away the consequences of the sinful deed! That's why that distinguished Australian preacher by the name of Frank Borchers could write so well when he reminded us about the Prodigal Son.....and he said it is alright to read about the rejoicing when the son returned, it's alright to emphasize this glorious truth. But don't forget -- that in that town in the far country there were people who when they thought of the prodigal son couldn't rejoice, because they had to deal with the consequences of his wickedness.

Could it be, then, that God is teaching us through this lesson that He does not forget, nor should we? Small comfort, I suppose, to most of us, to believe that God should remember in this way. It serves a purpose, if for no other reason than this: that perchance you and I will go through life more circumspectly if we could only remember that day in and day out we're dealing with the stuff which tomorrow will not forget.

On page 16 of "Bits and Pieces" which I wrote for you, I remember what I gathered from that church of St. Mary the Virgin in the ancient town of Eves. As that church has remained there century after century, through good times and evil, a wise old vicar once recorded these words:

"Upon the wreckage of thy yesterday
design the structure of tomorrow.
Lay strong corner stones of purpose
and prepare
Great blocks of wisdom, cut from past
despair,
Shape mighty pillars of resolve to set
Deep in the tear-wet mortar of regret.
Work on with patience, though thy
toil be slow.
Yet day by day thy edifice shall grow.
Believe in God -- in thine own self believe.
All that thou desirest thou shalt achieve."

I said I wanted to deal with twin truths. This is one of them: that the past continues to hold us, to haunt us, and the consequences have to be paid.

And the second is this -- and you won't like it any better than the first: it can be said for all of us, no matter when we come to the end of our life, we will come incompletely. This is one of the things that Robert Frost had in mind, bless his soul, he put it in a classic way when he said, "A man does well to remember that there are some things that he has to leave to unfinished business." Whether a man lives to be 50 or 100, in all likelihood he's able to look back over the days of his years and admit that some of the things that he wanted to get done he never quite got done. Only one person who has lived was able to die and say, "It is finished." There is always the good that we think we would like to have done that we didn't get done!

Let me tell you a bit about my friend Jay McCoy, one of my cherished friends back there in the hinterland. Jay was in the printing business. He began in the Depression. He set up shop in somebody's basement...then he moved upstairs to borrowed places, renting space in a garage, year in and year out, leasing this area and leasing that area, and always his life ambition was to have a plot of ground and to build a brand new print shop all of his own that he could pass on to his sons....

....Jay worked hard, and in the prime of his life, the moment of achievement came. The piece of ground had been purchased....the dress shop for a printer had been constructed....brand new equipment had been put in place....he locked the door that night, all set to begin operation the next day. Jay McCoy died in his sleep. It was all there within reach! Life can deal with us that way, as

incompletely as all that.

Well, I have good news for you, this sermon doesn't end at that point, nor at this point. One has to read life realistically, and one may have to admit that it may end incompletely. But in God's sight, the lesson of Moses is this: He died as a faithful man....he died as a man who refused to complain to God against his lot. Even though there's a passage of Scripture that enables us to believe that Moses had turned to God and allowed God to believe that he was still in the prime of life, those years of frustration and failure had taught him something: that God was still to be trusted.

The measure of a man's life, then, is not when he dies, but how he dies --- as a faithful, trusting servant of the Lord. The measure of a man's life is not how far he gets; the measure of a man's life is the direction in which he is facing when he dies. And that's one reason why God sent Jesus Christ along the way, to meet each of us, and to always point us in the right direction. Herein lies our blessed hope, that ours, too, could be a death so noble.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
January 2, 1972

YOU ARE A GOOD GOD, You are a great God.

You are great in Your goodness and good in Your greatness, and we receive the benefits of Your grace. Thank you, Heavenly Father, for what has come to us in this time we have spent together.

We want to thank you for those who prayed that the Holy Spirit would be upon us as we gathered in this place. We want to thank You that our minds have been made free of evil thoughts.

We want to thank You for those who have been made sensitive to every good thing that we've experienced. We want to thank You for those who, once the time has been spent, will go their way, empowered, enabled by the Holy Spirit to live effectively as Your servants in the world outside.

We want to thank You, Heavenly Father, for this church, for those who are faithful to its teachings, for those who support in every way and embrace and respond to the challenge, in this day and in this place, to live according to Your way.

We want to thank You, Heavenly Father, for those who when they come this day to this place, come with a new-found joy, and they acknowledge Your hand . . .

(incomplete tape)

"THE HIDDENNESS OF GOD"

Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son,
our Lord. Amen.

In a two-and-a-half hour conference the other night with the Assistant Pastor, he and I put the finishing touches to our planning for the Lenten schedule -- yes, you heard me correctly -- for the Lenten schedule. Time passes quickly. Even though we've just had done with Christmas, Lent will be upon us before we know it. The first day of Lent this year, Ash Wednesday, is February 16.

We spent some time discussing certain characteristics that ought to be true for the things that we offer. We were absolutely agreed that whatever we would plan had to be something that would enable our people to deepen their lives spiritually. So we considered the necessity as well as the desirability of having the devotional service in the Nave on Wednesday night from 7:30 until 8:00, and then we reflected upon the wonderful response that was given last year on Wednesday nights to the studies in prayer that took place from 8:00 until 9:00 in Bieber Hall. And the Assistant Pastor felt very strongly that we ought to offer again something during that particular hour. But what should it be?

Bless his soul, since he's as close to the young people as he is, and since they can speak to him sometimes in an uninhibited fashion, he's perfectly aware of certain questions that they raise that you and I might never hear. So he came up, and I give him credit for it, with the suggestion that on Wed-

nesday nights during Lent, from 8:00 until 9:00, we might have a general series entitled "All That You Ever Wanted To Know About Christianity, But You Were Afraid To Ask." It could well be that even now, if the occasion would allow it, you would be invited to stand up and quite frankly and freely name the things about the Christian faith that you don't quite understand.....or one might slip now a bit on thin ice and suggest -- that you wonder if you really have to believe them in order to be saved.

More than one person has put the question, when he's felt that he could ask it candidly:

...since I don't believe in the virgin birth, will I be saved?

...do I have to believe in the Trinity? -- wouldn't it be

a lot easier to say you believe in God, period? Muslims

and Jews do it that way and they have no complications

whatsoever....but you Trinitarian Christians come along and

you say, "God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit"

-- do I have to believe in that?

Chances are any number of you from time to time, in the quiet of your own soul, have seen a question go back and forth upon the horizon of your mind for which you have yet to get what might be a satisfying answer. Well, at any rate, anticipate the beginning of the Lenten season and the first Wednesday night when we'll be doing that sort of thing -- "All That You Ever Wanted To Know About Christianity But Were Afraid To Ask."

But long before that session the other night, I want you to know the sermon schedule for today was on the so-called drawing board. It bears the title, "The Hiddenness of God." And this is something that irritates and vexes a number of people:

-- the fact that God is not always clearly seen

- the fact that God's voice cannot always be heard
- the fact that God's will cannot always be made known....

This troubles a number of people. So very naturally I come to you this morning inspired and encouraged to talk to you about this business of a God who hides Himself.

Do I have to tell you what I hope that you sense by this time, that there's no question in my mind about the reality of God. There is absolutely no question in my mind about the necessity of being sustained and stabilized in this business of living by the fact of God. Was it the President of Yale or Harvard, I've forgotten which, who some time ago said the really true mark about an educated or a mature person is the fact that he's able to speak the name of God with reverence and without hesitation. It is God who gives meaning to our lives. Major Wolff is absolutely right when he sends us his thoughts in the letter that I read to you, that when people give up their faith in God, when they no longer believe in God, how then can life itself have any meaning whatsoever? The little boy who found himself with these words stumbling out over his lips as he offered his nightly prayer, "O God -- and you be sure to take care of yourself because if anything happens to you, we're all going to be stuck!".....the little boy was speaking as truthfully as anyone can speak. It's the fact of God, you see, that remains essential and necessary for us.

Now I have to ask you, as I've asked myself, since this is true, why then do we have to put up with a situation every now and then when God seems far away, when it seems absolutely impossible to hear His voice, to feel the gentle pressure of His hand upon our shoulder? Why is this true? If God is the essential for our existence?

As you read the Psalms you know that more than one psalmist had to say,

"I cry unto Thee, and Thou dost not answer." You may remember Job, one of the grandest and best men in the Old Testament -- a man so good that there were people who believed that he had a special spot in God's heart -- even Job was known to have said, "O that I knew where he was, that I might find him."....

Isaiah, beloved prophet, in his 15th verse of the 45th chapter of his writing, which serves as the text for this sermon, complained and admitted:

"Verily, you are a God who hides yourself."

You may want to brace yourself a bit now when I tell you, and call to your remembrance, that even Jesus Christ, clothed in full humanity, hanging upon the cross, cries out words that will be remembered until the end of time: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

....as much as to say,

"Where are you, God? --- why don't you show up?

--- let me feel your hand, let me hear your voice -- "

...it is the plight of many of us to be able to admit that there are times when God seems to be a God who hides Himself.

Now what's to be said about this? Is God to blame? Our chief custodian, our good and kind friend, Mr. Cofield, has a thing on bumper stickers -- they change periodically. The one he had on before the one he carries now read:

"IF YOU AND GOD ARE NOT AS CLOSE AS
YOU ONCE WERE, GUESS WHO MOVED"

...there are times, you see, when there is this gap, this separation -- all right, admit it! What's to be said about it?

Well, this too we can say about God -- He doesn't yell, He doesn't shout.

Nor does He glare at us with a blinding light. Maybe it would be a lot easier for us to believe in Him if He were always shouting us down or brandishing some evidence of His sovereignty no matter where we turned. Maybe. But I doubt it.

It could be, you see, that the fault is not with God but the fault is with us. God is always there. We are the ones who could become insensitive to Him. We could become insensitive to Him because we are conditioned by our sin. The more a man sins, the farther he drives himself away from God. The more a man delights in doing his own will, the more difficult he will have in discerning the will of God for his life. It is as simple as all that. And because you and I happen to live in a world with so many pressures playing upon us, if we ourselves do not make the situation different, then the situation in which we find ourselves usually is not conducive to being made aware of God.

There's a verse of Scripture that used to puzzle me. Now I think I'm beginning to understand, at least to a degree, what it means:

"Seek ye the Lord while He may be found,
call ye upon Him while He is near."

Human as we are, we have the seasons of the spirit, the flow...the ebb, when there are times because human as we are, it's made easier for us to think the thoughts of God or it's made more difficult -- just because we are human, and just because we are caught up in the human situation. But God is not to blame! This may be one reason, then, why He becomes hidden to our eyes...this may be one reason why we may become deaf to His calling. I honestly believe that God is always calling to us. I also believe, as the British say, that God is sending out intimations, God is hinting His presence, God is putting out signals.

I'm not so sure that I subscribe to the notion that we find God. I don't think that any man can find God. To begin with, God is never lost, and it is

rank presumption for a man to say "I have found God." But to the contrary, it's God who finds us! And to our everlasting satisfaction, it's God who is seeking us -- He's always coming our way. But due to our human limitations, we don't always hear, see, or become aware of God's nearness.

I could also suggest to you that there's another reason perhaps why God sometimes appears to us to be hidden, and that is if He should allow Himself to withdraw for a season, or I might say very quickly, if He allows us a situation where it appears that He's withdrawn, it's in order that our faith may grow and develop. How much you may be aware of this I don't know, but we're having trouble with the heating system...when I came down early this morning there was no heat at all, so we sent out the emergency cry and we've gotten assistance. Now even in this hour it's become rather uncontrollable, now it's stabilizing a bit, but there was a time this morning when it occurred to me that maybe we would have church without benefit of a heating system -- the first in my knowledge that this has occurred in Saint Luke. And I'll be very frank with you, I wasn't about to become too disturbed by it, because maybe it could be a very salutary thing for us to have had to endure a bit of discomfort for a change, if only to appreciate what hasn't failed before, and to have confidence that it will work again.

....that's a poor illustration, but maybe it will stand on three legs if not four.....

....perchance God allows us to have our moments when seemingly He withdraws in order that when He does appear, according to our limitations, we can appreciate Him as we've never appreciated Him before.

All of us have our dreams of a lifetime, of course, and with you I have had mine, and still have. I remember once when a dream was fulfilled -- to go atop an Alpine peak, to stay there for the night, to see the sun set, to see the sun

rise. So I remember Mt. Niessen (?), hard by the Swiss village of (Tune). In the morning, just for a little while, we saw the sun rise. Then the clouds settled in, and I could not see the Jungfrau in the distance. But I had seen the Jungfrau, but momentarily now it was hidden from view. I would have been a fool to have walked away and said, "It is not there." So for whatever reason may seem reasonable to you, there may be moments when God appears to be hidden from our view. And that could be our opportunity to trust Him, and to believe that His goodness does not fail.

I used to think that it would be a wonderful thing to have lived when Jesus was here on earth. Then I'd have no problem with my faith! Jesus would always be there to comfort me, to re-assure me. There would be no doubt about it because He was "very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father . . . "

...well, I've been disillusioned, as I am sure you have been, because I read my Bible, and I remember that time and time again Jesus had to shake those people up, who were standing right alongside of Him, and say, "Why don't you believe me? Why can't you see?" His dearest friend, John, had to admit, "Why there stands one among you -- right now -- and you can't even see him. You don't know who he is!" God is to be understood by faith. Maybe in the dark night of the soul we could spend our time far better than complaining against God that we can't see Him, to the end that we ought to pray: "Increase my faith!"

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

The meditation on this Communion day is of necessity a brief one. It will last for about five minutes.

Christians are great on touching one another. Where the practice ever developed, I suppose it could be traced back to the fact that when our Blessed Lord was here on earth there were people who felt that they would be improved spiritually if only our Lord could lay His hand upon them. You may remember there's a passage in Scripture that says, "They brought young children to him" - - - if only He might touch them....

...preachers make a habit of greeting their people, either before or after the service, by touching them -- that's right, by shaking their hand....

When the church was young, would you believe it, that they wrote into their ritual, and a very interesting practice it was, the 'kiss of peace' -- when Christians gathered together, even as a part of their worship experience, they embraced one another, they kissed one another.

I do not think it an indiscreet thing for me to tell you that sometimes when administering the Sacrament, my eye falls down to the Communion rail, and there I discover occasionally, only occasionally, a man and a woman touching one another as together they approach the altar to receive the Sacramentor it may be a mother and a daughter touching one another as they receive the Sacrament.

This gives me cause to ponder, and I wonder, what does this mean? There are those who would say they have a relationship with each other as they come to receive Communion...Communion is something not only with God but with one

another. I would like to believe that as they touch one another, there is an indication by this gesture that they need one another, and that whatever blessing one person receives as he comes to the altar, as he touches another person, the blessing that he receives is going to be channeled into that person's life as well.

Do I have to remind you that when our Blessed Lord first shared the sacred meal,

it was on the night when He was betrayed. They were not perfect people. They brought to that sacred meal that night all of their human frailties. They were sinners. In the company of those who surrounded that sacred table was a betrayer.....in the company of those who came to that sacred table was a denier. Every single one of them became a person who forsook Him and ran away. They brought their limitations.

Nonetheless, the Lord Jesus Christ stayed at that table. He did not deny them access. Rather, He must have encouraged them to come in their weakness that they might receive from Him strength.

Must I tell you this morning, those who were there at that table were a limited company -- our Blessed Lord did not go out into the streets of Jerusalem where there were many people and corral them in and say, "Come on in -- we're going to have quite a supper and you should be present." There were only twelve people around that table beside Him.....if you please, they were a limited company. They were the ones who had committed themselves to Him. They were the ones who called Him Lord and Master -- they would be His servants. But they were imperfect. They were sinners.

If I had one ascription to be given to people who approach the Table of the Lord, I would say, it is for sinners only. And as we come to the Table of the Lord, directly or indirectly touching one another, we are indicating that with

our strengths and weaknesses, whatever they may be, we are humbled before the presence of the Lord. Mindful of our limitations, He gives Himself. And that's why as a bunch of sinners we keep coming back, because we need to be replenished, we need to be strengthened, we need to be nurtured. The person alongside of you, in front of you, behind you this day -- we all stand on the same ground. None of us is perfect.

Late this afternoon as I shall drive to Gettysburg, where tonight and three nights of this week I'll share in a preaching mission in Adams County, I'll have good and fond memories of Gettysburg because there I spent three exceedingly wonderful years in my life. And when I get a chance to go back to the Seminary, I'll think of the Chapel where I used to receive the Holy Communion....and I'll think of the men with whom I went to that altar -- all of us a bunch of sinners, whom God saw fit to use in His ministry. All of us whom God sees fit to use -- a bunch of sinners! -- who are being redeemed! -- and strengthened -- and saved for a purpose.

And that's the history of this congregation as we remember it this day: a steady stream of people through 32 years who have gone to the altar and have returned, replenished, strengthened, nurtured to hold aloft the banner of Jesus Christ. May the strength that they knew be vouchsafed to us.

* * * *

(transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
January 30, 1972

Septuagesima Sunday

"TO KEEP A VOW"

Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son
our Lord, Amen.

Most of us are people who are always having something happen to us. Maybe it's something big; maybe it's something little. Maybe it's something good.....maybe it's something bad. But generally speaking, most of us are people who are always having something happen to us.

Unsettling as it may be, that's precisely what makes life interesting. But life was never meant just to be something interesting. For those of us who are believers, life was always meant to be something spiritually significant, to which the eternal dimension could always be added.

Now having said that, let me read for you the text for today's sermon. It's recorded as the 14th verse of Psalm 116:

"I will pay my vows unto the Lord now,
in the presence of all his people."

These words are spoken about a man who had something happen to him. And because something happened to him, he realized that the thing that happened to him wasn't the important thing as much as what he would do with the thing that happened to him. I presume you're as curious as I am--- what do you think it was that happened to him that provided him with such a traumatic experience? As you read Psalm 116 in its entirety, you're caught up with the fact that it was a terrible thing....he keeps talking about the fact that he almost died....he keeps mentioning the fact that the snares of hell almost caught him....he talks about, in his despair, crying out to the

Lord.

It must have been a pretty bad situation, so bad that he honestly believed that there wasn't a thing that he could do about it, and that he'd have to look for help. You can understand that, can't you? Granted you and I have any amount of length of years, we inevitably will have a skirt with death before we die. And if it comes any time sooner than we think it ought to come, chances are we'll cry out and lament and say we're too young to have anything like this happen to us. It's unfair! There are so many things we want yet to do.....and then in our anguish, we cry out for somebody to help us. We may not know who or what, but at least we're willing to believe that it's something or someone over and above us who ought to get into the act, and do something in our behalf.

Now going back to the chap with whom the 116th Psalm deals, what do you suppose it was that happened to him?

...let your imagination have free course for a moment...
do you suppose he had fallen down a well as he was
traveling along in Palestine, and then he found himself
in that well, in its darkened depth, and for maybe 24
hours at a stretch...48 hours maybe -- two days, two
nights without anything to eat, in a cramped position
...his nostrils being filled by the stench of an unused
well.....the anguish all the greater because he can
hear people up there going by, and they don't hear him
when he cries out for help.....and maybe he has the
added torment of all of his life passing in front of him
now, when he's faced with the terrible prospect that this
could be his kind of death.....

I know a woman for whom I have the highest regard, a very vital person, whose life has taken on added and deeper meaning because she once fell down a well, and she too cried out, until she was rescued. What do you suppose it was the befall this man -- so much so that he had to cry out and honestly believed that help would come?

There was a parishioner of ours back in Pennsylvania who loved to fish and to hunt. Whether he was fishing or hunting I can't quite remember now, but as he was about to scale yonder mountain-top, he slipped and broke his leg -- immobilized -- hour after hour and for a day-and-a-half he cries out for help, honestly believing that the universe is so constituted that a man was never intended to die like that, that help would be forthcoming.

Most of us, if we have any length of years at all, inevitably have a skirt with death. What will you make of it? I can't answer for you. I'm not so sure that I can answer for myself. I can tell you what this one man did with it, a man characterized in Psalm 116. After it had happened to him, he says triumphantly and magnificently: "I will pay my vows unto the Lord now, in the presence of all his people." From that moment on he realized that life could never again be the same and he wasn't going to let it be the same, and he was going to see it through the eyes of the eternal dimension.....he was going to make certain promises because of it, and he'd make certain promises in God's name!

It's an ancient tradition, this thing of making vows. Because something has happened to you, you're going to take a stand, and you build upon it, and you make certain commitments. Look what happens to us in the common ventures of life -- look what happens within the framework of the

Christian church, when we experience the common ventures of life....

...a child is born -- something has happened in and through and to two people. They seize upon the moment, they recognize that now in their lives there's a difference -- where there had been two, now there are three...where there had been three, now there are four...where there had been four, now there are five.....and they bring the child to within the shadow of an altar and they make certain vows, certain promises, they identify the experience with the eternal.....

...the church talks about a youngster reaching the age of reason, when he is in a position where he might be able to make a decision for himself as relating Christian belief and commitment, and so we have Confirmation. And what is Confirmation but a maturing youngster making a vow, if only to re-affirm the vow that had already been made. As he makes the vow now in his own name on reaching a significant point in life in which he recognizes something has happened to him already, and realizes all the things that could yet occur, he brings the eternal dimension into focus.....

...as is our custom, couples are interviewed before they are married. There was the couple yesterday -- "Why do you want to get married?" is always the crucial question that's put. And we wait for an answer in depth. If it isn't forthcoming, we encourage the ways by which such an

answer could be recognized. They answered it beautifully: "We want to get married because we can't think of going through life without each other, and we honestly believe that there's a certain need that each of us can meet in the life of the other" -- and that's what it is to be in love, to be able to meet the need of another and to become identified with that person. "Why do you come here to be married?" -- "Because we want the blessing of God".....it's not enough that they should make promises to each other. But in this significant moment in their life, when something has happened to them, when two people look upon each other as they will never again look upon another person, they want to make a vow, so that the eternal dimension is present, that God is linked up with it....

....I wouldn't give much for any man who when he stands alongside a grave, recognizing the completion of an earthly pilgrimage, a life to which he has been related, and now soberly he recognizes that dust to dust a man returns ...who doesn't walk away from that experience and somehow make a vow and a commitment all over again to Jesus Christ.

I'm not at liberty, of course I'm not, to share with you some of the exceedingly significant things that happen in the life of the pastors of this congregation, but I would indicate for you -- the day I found him wandering in the hall outside my office -- his wife was in surgery at that particular time.....it's as though all the world were closing in on him, and together we

went into the Chapel of the Grateful Heart and we prayed.....in that critical moment when something is happening, one reaches out for God, makes certain promises, recognizes the spiritual dimension of life. So this chap, whatever it was that happened to him, terrible as we're led to believe that it was, said, "I will pay my vows unto the Lord now, in the presence of all his people."

You see, make no mistake about it, in this life of ours there are good and evil influences at work upon us. They are at work either from within or without, and the test of maturation may be a man's ability to recognize the good and the evil that is at work on him, and then hopefully to ask God to harness the good and to make the most of what is happening to him.

I am intrigued by the fact that the text says "I will pay my vows unto the Lord now." There is a critical time when this ought to be done, there is a tide of the spirit. Scripture says, "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, Call ye upon Him while He is near." There is a propitious moment that ought not to be allowed to pass, when a man links himself up with the eternal dimension, when he establishes as clearly the relationship with God.

I am also intrigued with the fact that when he made this vow, this chap, whatever the terrible thing was that happened to him -- he just simply didn't fall upon his knees where he was all by himself, but he said, "I will let my testimony be made known in the presence of all his people." Most vow-making that you and I offer, we make in the presence of other people, in the presence of witnesses, and this is exactly as it ought to be. Because they too ought to share in what's happening with us, and from that time on we ought to be encouraged and stimulated by the precious memory that the vow

that we made, we made with they were at hand.

It's not too much to suggest that when you and I come back to church, we find ourselves in the presence of people. And as we find ourselves in the presence of people we may look back and we may remember other occasions when we made certain promises. Here within the company of the faithful we are nurtured and encouraged and stimulated and challenged to keep the vows that we've made. I'm willing to suggest to you that a man is to be judged by the kind of vows he makes, by the kind of re-orientation he gives to his life, because this determines the kind of a person he eventually becomes. I'm willing to suggest, what you think and feel in these sacred moments within these hallowed walls determines the kind of person you are beyond these walls.

What's happened to you lately, my friend? Something big? Something little? Something good? Something bad? It makes for an interesting life. But life was meant to be something more than interesting. It was meant to be spiritually significant, to recognize the God-factor, the eternal dimension. Whatever it is that's happened to you lately, have you linked it up with God?

The re-assuring thing is that when you make a vow in the presence of God, God helps you to keep that vow. And that's the added advantage that a believer has. What can there be in God's sight that's more precious than the nobly intentioned? And even the nobly-intentioned need to be sustained and encouraged and reminded. And that's part of the business of God, too.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE STRANGER AT THE DOOR"

Through Jesus Christ, Thy
Son, our Lord. Amen.

Today's sermon bears the title "Stranger At The Door"; and the text is the 20th verse of the 3rd chapter of the Book of Revelation:

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock,
says the Lord. If any man will hear my
voice and will open the door, I will
come in."

Those of us who are privileged to work with teenagers invariably find it a jolting experience. As an example, it's quite a jolt to realize that you're dealing with people who can't remember a day when we didn't have television. You see, some of us can remember when radio was in its infancy, the day of the crystal set, the day of the Atwater Kent, with its horn and series of dials that you adjusted, and WLS, KDKA, WJZ were part of an every-day vocabulary.

Why, I can remember the days of the Model T Ford, I can still think in terms of the gadget that was above the windshield, you see, that you cranked in order to raise the windshield when you wanted a draft of cool air in the summer-time....

...and how you turned this thing back and forth
when you needed to have the windshield wiper mechanized...
...and when you'd have to get gas, of course you got
out of the car, you raised the seat, and then you got
the measuring stick and you stuck it down in to see
how much gas was there.....

....and that Model T Ford, it had three pedals on the floor, didn't it? One was the clutch, the other the brake, and the one in the middle was the reverse. And occasionally there were those who'd get mixed up, all fouled up, and they'd depress the middle one, and then much to their surprise, they'd be plunged backward.....

....now that's about the frame of mind in which I find myself now, standing at this sacred desk this morning. I've been plunged backward a bit. And I'll tell you why and how.

On the stand by my study chair is a stack of periodicals, always waiting to be read. The one that I tackled this week had a dateline of January 1, 1972. And as I read that article that was in that magazine, I was dealing with something a man had said about New Year's resolutions.

Now I know very well that today is February 6. But psychologically I am adjusted back there to January 1. And when I read that article, the man was telling all about the enthusiasm that he was bringing to a brand new year. He has a series of resolutions that he made, that he was sharing with other people. He was quite excited about the fact that '72 was going to be different. Here were the things that he would do that would make 1972 different.

I hope you know by this time that I'm not by nature a cynical person. But I found myself at least amused when I said to myself, "Poor chap! -- about five weeks have run their course. If I were a gambling man, I'd be willing to bet that you haven't fared very well....that resolution after resolution that you've made you just haven't kept -- not nearly as well as you would like to have kept those resolutions." This is not a cynical appraisal

of life, it's a realistic appraisal of life. And talk about being realistic, let me submit to you two things:

...one, God pity the man who doesn't make resolutions. Whatever advance or progress we make occasionally, we make because we decide that we want to see the situation improved. A man must needs become nobly intentioned, and firmly resolved.

...the second thing that needs to be said, equally realistically, is this: that, like as not, we won't always fare as well as we would like. And occasionally we have our moments when we are greatly distraught by the fact that we just haven't advanced as well as we would have liked to advance. You see, we are human, and because we are human, we are conditioned and victimized

-- well, maybe that's not the right word to say --

maybe I'd better stick with the word conditioned

...we are conditioned by the forces at work around us.

We associate with certain people, and to a large measure we become pretty much as the influences at work in our lives through them allow us to become. Some of us become better than we are because we have friends who are always bringing out the best in us. Some of us become poorer than we ought to be because, wittingly or unwittingly, we have friends who are always bringing out the worst in us. They may not intend it that way, but that's the way it happens. And a man, whether he cares to accept the fact or not, is pretty well conditioned by the people with whom he associates.

A man is also victimized or conditioned, use whichever word you want, by his past. Some of us drag it along behind us like a ball-and-chain. We just never have done with it, for the simple reason that the

past remains a part of us. Oh, it isn't a question whether God forgives or not. It's a fact that a man becomes conditioned by all that has ever happened to him and by the things that are yet to take place.

I think there are sociologists who establish a case and tell us that a man becomes what he is pretty largely by the fact that he happened to have been born at the time that he was born. That children who were born ten years apart or five years apart have vastly different influences at work upon their lives, by virtue of that five-year or ten-year span.

Well, what's to be said, after we've agreed to this? Let's admit it, many of us, if not most of us, would like to be far better than we are. The truth of the matter is we're always running out of good things: kindness, love, patience, humility. You name it. Mention any of the virtues -- we never have quite enough to go around. Why don't we improve at a speedier rate? Chances are we're not about to lift ourselves up by our boot-straps. This is simply to say that all the habits and the forces of earlier years essentially lack the dynamic that we need. So what is there that we need? What we need is something brand new, something, if you please, totally other, totally unlike anything that we've ever experienced.

God, who has all of our needs in mind, has that in mind also. This is one reason why God gave us Jesus Christ. He is, if you please, the totally unlike any other who comes our way:

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock,
says the Lord. If any man will hear
my voice and will open the door, I
will come in."

...what we need basically is to have somebody to get in on the inside of us, to make the change at that point. This is what it means to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ! With all the earnestness of my soul I submit it to you -- this is what the Christian message is, that we ourselves cannot help

ourselves. We cannot achieve solely by our own strength. Someone has to come to us, to inspire, to motivate, to enable, to empower. God says "I want to do it for you.".....that's why He gives us Jesus Christ. He comes to us as the stranger of Galilee.

Whether you agree or not, without any hesitation I tell you that God is always making overtures in our direction....God is always coming our way - - - every single soul is on God's calling list. And when He comes your way, He would like very much to have you open the door of your heart. He'd like very much to have you submit to Him, to surrender, to permit Him to take over.

I'm wondering if you'll indulge me for a moment as I become quite personal. I don't apologize for it. I only ask that you allow me to do it.....

...the day we laid my mother to rest, I went back to the little place that she called home in the latter part of her life, and there I took from the wall something that she had always wanted me to have
(holding picture of Christ at the Door by Holman Hunt)

...it has little commercial value. Its value sentimentally is beyond price. It's an artist's interpretation of this text. You may not be able to see it from where you are, but it's Jesus Christ standing at a door, with upraised hand, knocking.....

My mother was the daughter of an immigrant. She had been reared and trained in the Roman Catholic faith. Devout as she was in her own way, when she turned to God prayerfully she had to have something that served as a focal

point in front of her. So it was this artist's interpretation of Christ knocking at the door that became like the altar in our home.

My father, as I reminded you repeatedly, was an immigrant pedlar. He would take those two suitcases of his, one in either hand, with that leather strap around his shoulders, and walk sometimes from village to village. During the depression days and before, he'd be gone maybe a week, ten days at a time. My mother would gather us six kids as a hen gathers her chicks, and there we'd pray. She'd ask God to watch over my father, hopefully that he might make some sales and be brought home safely. The picture has left its own indelible mark upon the fabric of my soul. I cannot divorce it from this text, I cannot divorce it from the gist of this sermon.

Jesus Christ, who comes our way, comes as the Stranger. Now you and I fully admit that some of us can say that our lives have been changed because of strangers we've met. It could be that for some of you the most wonderful friends you've ever gotten to know in life first came to you as a stranger. It could be that there are some people who could curse the day they were born, because they happened to meet one day a stranger who fouled them up. Our lives are determined by the strangers we encounter. Jesus Christ comes to some people as a stranger, totally unlike any other that they've ever met before. And He stands at the door of a man's heart, and He knocks.

- - did I or did I not tell you that the latch on this door, according to the artist's interpretation, is on the inside? - - which simply means that the door has to be opened from the inside. Jesus Christ never forces His way into any man's life. He waits to be invited in. He'll come our way, all right, but He has to be asked in. The little boy in Sunday

School spoke quite wisely when the teacher said to him and to the other members of his class, "Why do you suppose nobody answers the door? - why do you suppose Jesus Christ is still standing there on the outside?" The little boy came up with two answers, both of them equally good: "Maybe they're too busy talking to each other".....(he might have said, "Maybe they're too busy shouting and yelling at each other") - - "that they don't hear Him." His second answer: "Or maybe they're downstairs in the cellar and they don't hear Him."

There are some people like that, who spend the greater part of their life in the cellar, and never come up to open the door where the clean fresh breath of God can blow upon them, where the breath of the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ, can refresh them.

With all the earnestness of my soul I tell you that Jesus Christ, the total stranger, comes your way to make a difference in your life. I am of the opinion, rather I would say I am of the conviction, that I would never again want to come to this pulpit if I did not believe it.....that a man remains less that what he could be until he surrenders to Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul, who had a right to speak, said it in a very classic way, "If any man be in Christ, he becomes a brand new person altogether."

...are you a bit lethargic, my friend, are you trudging along wearily, not much different than you were five months ago, five years ago? Let me encourage you to allow a difference to be taking place in your life, a tremendous difference. Let the Stranger of Galilee in. Let Him take over. Let the change that needs to take place take place from the inside. It's quite an experience. I recommend it to you.....because I know.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE RIGHT SORT OF CRUCIFIX"

Through Jesus Christ, Thy
Son, our Lord. Amen.

On this Sunday next before the beginning of Lent, the sermon bears the title, "The Right Sort of Crucifix"; and the text, the 14th and 15th verses of the second chapter of that letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to that group of Christians who lived in a town called Colossae:

" . . . nailing it to a cross, and having
spoiled principalities and powers, he
made a show of them openly, triumphing over
them in it . . . "

It's a rather difficult text to understand, even at the first reading. Tuck it away in the recesses of your mind. We'll come back to it shortly.

Now let it be said that there are all kinds of people in this world. And because there are all kinds of people in this world, people get their kicks in different ways. Some people get a great kick out of waiting for the precise moment when they can ask a loaded question....it provides them a peculiar kind of satisfaction...

...like the chap the other day -- overhearing our conversation when we were talking about the whole subject of eternal life. Somebody had suggested that there could be a precise moment when Christ the Judge makes His decision -- that He'll withhold passing sentence until a certain time.....now as ever against that, our friend on the sidelines, the spectator, comes right in and hurls his loaded question: "What do you think -- " he says -- " which is more important -- the way a man dies,

or the way he lives?" -- "Which is going to have greater value in God's sight?"

Now it wasn't long after he asked the question until he provided us the reason why he asked the question. He had a friend who had been quite a rascal. Now on his death-bed the penitent asked God to forgive him. He was much impressed with the fact that his friend had come through finally. And he honestly believed that this, now, was the hallmark of his friend's life, that he would be judged not on the way he lived, but by the way he died.

I presume he thought he had good authority for this because he remembered what he had read in the Bible, how Jesus Christ was crucified between two thieves, two wicked people, two rascals. And the one rascal was moved to repentance, and he cried out with a dying breath, so it would seem, to Jesus Christ, to remember him. And then and there, as you recall the verse of Scripture for yourself, Jesus Christ signed, sealed and delivered by saying to him, "Verily I say to you, Today you will be with Me in paradise."

...now my friend of the loaded question implies that the chap of his acquaintance, like the dying thief, is to be remembered gloriously because of his final moment in death.....

Now let's get a thing straight. God in His mercy deals graciously with us. There should be no question about that. Whatever else God is or is not in your mind, let it be clearly understood that He is a God of love and a God of mercy. And He does not desire the death of a sinner. When His Blessed Son was here on earth, He kept talking about the joy in Heaven, when the angels rejoice over one sinner who repents. There's no question about this. And when you and I think in these terms, we're talking about the removal of guilt, the reconciliation that's established, the sinner who is being made right in God's sight now.....not because of what the sinner has done, or

failed to do, but because of the redemptive deed performed by Jesus Christ. This does become effective, there should be no question about that.

But I rush to tell you this, my friend, it's very risky business for any man to believe that no matter how he may live, that with one grand swell stroke he can make up for it, with a dying gasp, by asking God to have mercy. For evil is evil. And the result of evil remains. I have reminded you constantly, haven't I, of what that Australian Methodist preacher did with the parable of the Prodigal Son - - - he gave us a brand new interpretation of that parable.....

...he said it's a perfectly grand and wonderful thing to talk about the waiting father who forgives, and re-establishes the rascal in his own home - - - talk about this, please -- go on talking about a God of love and forgiveness...
...but Frank Boreham also said, don't forget for a single minute that there were some people who weren't very happy whenever they thought of the Prodigal Son, because they were the ones back there in the far country who had to continue to put up with his misdeeds, his diabolical behaviour....

....there was the girl whose virtue he had spoiled
....there was the baby he had left behind
....there was the man he had defrauded
...there in the far country were the boys he had led astray..
....they had to go on putting up with the result of his wickedness. Don't forget that, says Frank Boreham.

And Frank Boreham is absolutely right. And all this leads me to suggest to you that in the final analysis it's the totality of a man's life that really counts -- at least as far as those of us are concerned who have to put up with

the results of his life lived here on earth, no matter how noble his dying gasp may be. So the chap with the loaded question:

What do you think, now, really is more important,
the way a man lives, or the way a man dies?

It could be established very clearly that what a man is remains basically, even though his soul may cry out for forgiveness. You're not forgetting, are you, the semi-humorous tale that's told about the chap who had not been a very good man, surely not exemplary.....the town's people thought ill of him, and he thought ill of them....

....having become ill, he was attended by his physician, who very quickly recognized the condition in which he was. Good physician that he was, he advised him that he wasn't long for this world, and he suggested that he may want to make amends....

....so the man, critically, facing death imminently, suggested that maybe his enemies should be invited to his room. And as they came, this reprobate says to them: "I know I've done you wrong....and I know that some of you people have done me wrong. My doctor tells me I'm not long for this world. So I want you to know that I forgive you - - " ...but then, with his weakened breath that suddenly took on strength and an air of defiance, he says, " - - but get one thing clear -- if I pull through this thing, it's all off!"

...it could be that what a man is basically remains, even in the shadow of death.

Significantly enough, this is the Sunday next before the beginning of Lent. Through the entire Lenten season what will the Church be calling you to do? This church, very properly caught up in the tradition, will be asking us, in all the hymns that we sing, in all the prayers that we pray, in many of the Scripture lessons that we read, in many of the sermons that will be preached, to

remember the death of Jesus Christ. We will concentrate on that.

That it might be indelibly marked upon the fabric of your mind, we'll be erecting again, here in the chancel, a huge cross, large enough on which to place the body of a man. And every Wednesday when you come it will be confronting you, because this is the purpose of the Lenten season, to expose people all over again to the death of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is remembered for the way that He died.

But let me stop here for the moment to tell you about an 18-year-old girl who not so long ago committed suicide. She left behind her this note:

"I made a bargain with God a year ago. I told God a year ago that life wasn't treating me the way I thought life ought to treat me. Good things were not coming my way, and I told God I'd give him a year, and if in the course of this year things didn't change, if nothing good came my way, I would end it all. Well, that's the bargain I made with God. Nothing good has come my way....life has not been kind to me, life's not been good to me. So I'm ending it all -- I'm keeping my part of the bargain. I had hoped that maybe God through life would have done better by me.".....and so she died.

This Lenten-tide we remember all over again the way Jesus Christ died. He, too, died deliberately. But not because He was complaining against life which brought Him no good thing. He died triumphantly, because that's the way He lived. So I would say to my friend with the loaded question: nonsense! -- which is more important, the way a man lives or the way a man dies?

...the way a man lives determines the way he dies!

Jesus Christ died as He lived. That's why He lives even though He died. Sounds like double talk, doesn't it? But it isn't, really. God's great Galilean went all over the land so precious to Him as one who was ever in command. No matter what happened, He was triumphantly equal to it. When the enemies of Christ thought they were taking His life, He completely outwitted them, out-loved them. By laying His life down, He gave it up. He died as He lived. That's why He lives even though He died . . . "

Why do I preach this sermon to you? Do I have to make it plain? It's given to every one of us some day to finish the earthly pilgrimage. No man escapes death. The question is, how will he die? I dare you to die triumphantly, because this becomes the Christian.

Now as to this text to which I said we would come back -- not to be forgotten -- the Apostle Paul says something about Jesus Christ dying on the cross. And when you and I think about Jesus Christ dying on the cross we talk about the way they nailed Him to the cross. The Apostle Paul remembered Jesus Christ and he said something about "the things that Jesus Christ nailed to his cross" - - - "the things that Jesus Christ nailed to his cross"! The Apostle Paul talks about the things that Jesus Christ did openly in front of His enemies, as one who was completely in control - - how He defied them, how He outwitted them, not as one who was victimized.

Whatever you do, my friend, don't pity Jesus Christ. He doesn't have to be pitied.....admire Him, stand in holy awe of Him. For He died as He lived. My old friend Ellwood DeLong used to tell me about a friend of his who was always talking about not simply doing something somehow, but whatever was done, he said, let it be done triumphantly!

In the two offices that I use here at Saint Luke Church, one for counseling and private matters, and the other office that I use for administrative

detail, there is a crucifix hanging above the door in each office. They've been gifts to me, one of them presumably blessed by the Pope. I cherish the thoughtfulness of my friend who brought them to me, charging me with the responsibility that no matter what I dictate, no matter what I plan, no matter what I project, no matter what may be the nature of my conversation, it all happens in the light of Jesus Christ who suffered and died.

I'm not so sure that I like either one of the crucifixes. I'm not so sure that I like any crucifix that I've ever seen. Frankly, I submit to you that I don't think they're as Christian as they ought to be. They're not as dynamic as they could be. Because as you look at a carved crucifix you look at a body that's gone limp, you look at eyes that are closed, you look at lips that are silenced, you look at somebody who has had something done to him. This is not the right sort of crucifix. I wish some day I could find a wood-carver who would carve for me what I am pleased to refer to as the right sort of crucifix - - - Jesus Christ hanging upon the cross in regal splendor, with His head erect, His eyes open, as though searching every single person who comes within His purview.....

...and His lips partly open as though they were about to speak those wonderful words: "Father, forgive them"

-- these are not the words of a dying man, these are the words of a conqueror: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit"

-- "Father, it's finished ---I---I have not shirked from duty,

-- I have not denied you the chance to work in and

through my life - - "

Just as Jesus Christ hanging upon the cross denied the gift of drugs that were brought to Him, so He died in complete control, mastering all His faculties. He's remembered by the way He died because He died the way He lived.

It could become the lot of every Christian not to live just somehow, but to live triumphantly. A noted psychiatrist examined three thousand different people, asking the same question: What are you really living for?

— 94% of them astounded by answering that they were living for some event in the future, and the implication was that because they were living for something yet to happen, they were not giving due and proper regard to the present moment.

Jesus Christ always looked upon every present moment as a golden opportunity to live life to the fullest. He died that way.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"Those Deadly Sins - PRIDE"

O GOD, from time to time a man's life has been straightened out because somewhere, somehow he was able to hear some echo of Your voice. Maybe that's what happened now as we spend this time in this place. To that end make us receptive, by the Holy Spirit, to what is now about to be said. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

huh 18:10 H

By prior announcement, the sermons to be preached these Sunday mornings during Lent have one general theme: The Deadly Sins. Today we consider the first in the series: the deadly sin of PRIDE. And the text is the 23rd verse of the 29th chapter of the Book of Proverbs:

"A man's pride will bring him low."

I have had opportunity by this time to look over quite casually an accumulation of some 20 - 25 questions scheduled for consideration these coming Wednesday nights when we'll talk about some of the things that vex and irritate Christians when they think about what they ought to believe, and what they ought to practice in the name of Jesus Christ. It's an interesting assortment of questions, some of them accumulated of course by pastors who have these things flung to them as they've ministered to people, either as they've preached or taught in small groups.

The collection that we have before us that we'll be thinking about these Wednesday nights is of quite a variety. But the one thing that has left a mark upon me, as I recall the list, is that very few if any deal specifically with the fact of sin. Nobody in this series, so far, has raised the question: How can I keep from sinning? Nobody in this series so far has asked the ques-

tion: What about the sin that can't be forgiven? Nobody, as far as I know, in this series is thinking about the question: Am I going to be held responsible for committing a sin if I didn't know I was committing it?

I am not so sure that I know exactly what this means. Shall we conclude that people no longer think in terms of sin? Shall we conclude that even Christians, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, in our day don't take sin seriously? Would you want to press that point?

For what it may mean to you, I am constrained to tell you that I am reasonably certain of one thing --

-- in certain households at least, where if a child did something that would require discipline, the father or the mother might say to the child: "That was a sinful thing! -- that was downright wicked! -- do you think God is pleased with us when we behave like that?"

....strange as such language may seem to you now, we are told there was a day when parents would talk that way to their children.

Now if something's done that shouldn't have been done, we may take them to task by saying: "That was naughty!"we may say: "That was not nice!"we may say that that was not very decent. But who talks about something not pleasing in God's sight? Who talks about something as being downright wicked?

Oddly enough, ours is an age that is quite troubled by a good many things. Ask anyone that you may meet, and in all likelihood he'll tell you that things are not as they ought to be. He wishes that they were better! We go from one critical situation to another. There was a wise man who observed that as far as a parent is concerned, they just exchange one set of problems for another as their children grow and develop. For any man who deals with people -- ask

any personnel man -- he goes to his job each day knowing that it's simply going to be a different kind of a problem that day, but a problem it will be.

We clamor for peace....and there is no peace...

...we wish for peace....and yet we stand to benefit by all the peace conferences that the world has ever known. We sit down at the negotiation table, and there for a while we may resolve our differences, only with the understanding that it won't be long until we have to come back and start all over. Ask any man and he'll tell you, things are not exactly as he wishes they were. And how he wishes they could be better.

What's wrong with us?

Sociologists have their answer: change the environment! Give a man a better situation and he'll improve.

The genetecist says: don't blame him -- it's his genes. He can't help it if he happens to be the grandson of the grandfather that he had -- to say nothing of being the son of the father that he had -- - don't blame him!

Significantly enough, there remains in the vocabulary of the Church, there remains in our liturgical Order for Worship, the fact of sin. Sunday after Sunday when we come to worship, this magnificent liturgical Order of our Lutheran worship reminds us of this -- you're no sooner in your seat than the Church proposes words for your lips, and you are praying. Why not? -- because you happen to stand facing a cross, and the cross indicts every one of us:

"We poor sinners confess unto thee that we are by nature sinful and unclean . . ."

Sin belongs in the vocabulary of the Christian. Traditionally the Church keeps

the word sin in its vocabulary. This is the root of all of our problems.

What is sin? It can be defined, described, interpreted in a number of different ways. Basically it's disobedience -- man separating himself from God's wish and God's will and God's wisdom. You can begin at that point.

Now a word about this series -- called Deadly Sins. Does that imply that some sins are not to be considered as seriously as others? -- in the classic way the church does talk of deadly sins. Yet I say to you, it's risky business to believe that any sin can be taken lightly, and only a few, on the other hand, need to be taken seriously. Any sin is serious business. Because you never know when one sin may lead to another...and Cardinal Newman is absolutely right as he's quoted in "Pages in a Diary" in the bulletin that you have in your hands, and one of the worst things about our sinning could be that we get ourselves to the place we're no longer shocked by our sinning.

Highly sophisticated as we are in this age, maybe that's what happened to us: we've bent over trying to understand, to become permissive, that we're no longer shocked by the things we say and think and do, which basically alienate us from ourselves and from other people, and most certainly from God.

And now what about this Deadly Sin called PRIDE? Well, there's some more ground-clearing that has to be done before we get to the main thrust of the sermon. I would be less than honest if I did not tell you that there is such a thing as a proper pride -- a salutary self-esteem. We may call pride a sin, but on the other hand, never forget for a single moment that the poet was absolutely right when he said:

~~"Man~~ -- He who would climb and soar aloft

must ever keep alive within his soul the tonic

of a wholesome pride . . . "

Man has a right to see himself as he is, the crowning glory of all God's creation:

"What is man that Thou art mindful of him?
the son of man that Thou visitest him --
Thou hast made him a little lower than the
angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor - - "

God paid to man, of all created things, the supreme compliment, making him in His likeness, in His image.

In the Sacrament of Baptism, what are we doing but implanting upon the fragile soul of a child His divine imprimatur, if you please, the sign of the seal of God's favor - - here is a child of God.

....there is such a thing as a proper pride.

I do not know how it was with you last night, but if you had the good fortune to tuck a child into bed and to stand there by his bed, to be completely awed by the thought that God had allowed you to become the custodian, the overseer, the protector, the defender, the responsible agent for a human being! -- that it's within the realm of possibility that you can influence and direct the way of a child! Happy indeed is that man or that woman who stands over a child with what I refer to now as this proper pride -- that God could give them so great responsibility.

Any preacher worth his salt cannot demand respect if he doesn't first have a proper respect for himself. I wish I could give you right now in this place and in this way information to which I have been privy by what I would refer to as one of the greatest leaders of all Christendom in our day...

....when one time as we sat alone he told me of insult after insult that was cast upon him, by the people who thought he was a tool of the Devil. He kept his sanity by realizing that he dare not lose faith in his own integrity as a servant of God.

Martin Luther, bless his soul, found his way through all the trials and troubles of the Protestant Reformation by keeping alive within himself the tonic of a wholesome pride. There is such a thing as a salutary self-esteem. And unless a man has it, he can destroy himself....and unless he believes in it, he can destroy others.

Winifred and I were fortunate enough, after World War II, to provide a kind of home for a number of different people who came from Europe, whose loved ones had been put to death in concentration camps. We listened to them as we talked in the wee small hours of the morning, what they had to endure, and then occasionally I would read here and there about the type of person who survived the concentration camp, and like as not survival was simply a matter of maintaining faith in your own integrity! Otherwise you became as an animal.

With all the ardor of my soul I come down as heavy as I can on the sheer necessity for a man to have a healthy self-esteem. When you find it in a person, don't be foolish enough to call him arrogant or proud, just because you mis-read the fine print of his soul.

Now there is a sin that is pride. It's inordinate regard for one-self....

....whereby you exalt your own ego to the extent that

you rule out consideration for other people

...where you think of yourself and yourself alone and

ignore everybody else....

...where you want your own way, and you have no regard

for any other

...where it's never a question of what is right or what is

wrong, but where you allow, foolishly, yourself to believe

that it has to be your way.....

Any man who has had holy hands placed upon him and set aside as a pastor, as a minister of the Gospel, who spends three decades in the ministry, eventually finds that people come to him for counsel. And what is his great responsibility as he sits with people? to be awed by the fact that he is the one that introduced the God-factor, the eternal dimension, into the conversations, and bring it to bear against the situation. This is an awesome thing. When he exercises that great responsibility, he must also isolate the issues. What, now, really is the problem? And occasionally, would you believe me, the basic problem is that somebody's pride has been hurt! They're no longer in control of a situation, for whatever may be the reason, and this has thrown them for a loop....

...or it could be that when they're troubled they see only one aspect of the problem and that's theirs! A perfect example: wittingly or unwittingly, is the woman who came with her husband when they had a problem, and she said to the counselor, "Now that I've told you my side of the problem, let me tell you his!"

- - the sin of pride, of course, is always to deal with the situation from my point of view.....the sin of pride is always to grasp at the world with my hands, for my sake, for my glory, for my good.

I think I am in a position to tell you that while it may be called the deadliest of all sins, quite frequently it's the most difficult to detect, because the sin of pride can blind us. Perhaps it never occurs to us that we are this way, particularly if we try to justify our point of view, and feel in duty bound to maintain it.

Now how did it all happen? You can trace it back -- practically the first sin. God created the world.....here's the Garden of Eden. God is absolutely

delighted! And why shouldn't He be! He called it a good world -- a good week's work! Now He caps it off with human beings....He's able to communicate with them. He said: "Here it is! It's good -- take My word for it! -- and you're meant for it. Make the most of it -- enjoy it!

" . . . but here's one thing -- hear Me now -- here's one thing where there's a no-no . . . "

And Adam and Eve get together, for whatever their reason....they decide that they'll do it their way -- not God's.....

...would you believe that that's the way it all started?

Whenever it's my way, at the expense of a better way....

Whenever it's my way, at the expense of God's way.....

...now do you understand why it's called a deadly sin?

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Addenda: Young Benjamin Franklin, when he went to visit Cotton Mather, had an experience that illustrates the teaching in Proverbs. Franklin recounts the events in these words:

"He received me in his library and, on my taking leave, showed me a sorter way out of the house through a narrow passage, which was crossed by a beam overhead. We were still talking as I withdrew, he accompanying behind me, when he said hastily: "Stoop! Stoop!" I did not understand him, until I felt my head hit against the beam. He was a man who never missed any occasion of giving instruction, and upon this he said to me: "You are young, and have the world before you. Stoop as you go through it. You will miss many hard bumps." . . . "

"Those Deadly Sins - Avarice"

Grace, mercy and peace from
God our Father and from Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Let me at once, without any hesitation whatsoever, lay it on the line. For it seems to me that a line can be drawn. In the singing of the hymn which we have just concluded, we have either been remorseful, or hypocritical, one or the other. The reference specifically is to the words that came from your lips, even as they came from mine:

"Just as I am, poor wretched, blind - -"

Is this frankly the estimate that we have of ourselves? We, the educated ones, we, the scientific enlightened, we, the sophisticated ones, we who are part of what is known collectively as contemporary man, who prides himself on the fact that he's come a long way? Have we? It may all depend upon the direction in which you're looking....

....we've come a long way from the invention of the wheel to the supersonic transport....

....we've come a long way from the dawn of civilization when tiny steps were taken to the giant step that's been taken by man as he's left his footprint on the surface of the moon.....
....yes, we've come a long way in that direction.

But how about the direction of the human heart? -- the inner recesses of a man's mind, the depths of his soul remain pretty much as undiscovered country. And for the most part any number of us would prefer to keep it that way.

But people who are in a position to tell us authoritatively, we get some

idea of what we might find if we truly knew what was down deep inside us, very much like the person who refuses to see a physician because he doesn't want to hear what the physician might say as a result of an examination. So there are people who seldom allow themselves to turn in the direction of the Good Physician, lest His spiritual X-ray of the soul might reveal what is basically ugly and far from being pleasant. So, you see, thinking that way, I have to ask you -- can we honestly lay it on the line: "Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind -- rid my soul of one dark blot" . . . these, properly considered, become the words either of the remorseful, or the hypocritical.

It's the business of the Church, if I may put it that way, to remind us what we are. That's why, again and again and ever so often I have told you of the high regard that we ought to have for this wonderful liturgy of ours. No sooner are we gathered together than we remind ourselves of what we are in God's sight -- "We poor sinners confess unto Thee that we are by nature sinful and unclean." But the words come easily and we don't always remember what we've said. That's why the church also makes it its business to observe such things as the Lenten-tide, for during the Lenten season we hold up in front of us, vividly, as vividly as we can, the cross of Jesus Christ.

By deliberate design on Wednesdays when you come, the wooden cross, big enough on which to place the body of a man, that we might not forget that at a certain time in history God so loved that he allowed His Son to be killed by us.....when you sit here on a Wednesday night and look at that cross in the silence of the church, you have a perfect right to see the indicting finger of God pointed at you, and at me. It was because of you that this happened.

It's the regular message of the church, of course it is, and that's why we have the cross constantly on the altar, gleaming and brilliant -- don't

lose its message. It's not only the indicting finger that's being pointed, but also arms outstretched by which God is saying to us, "But in my mind you are worth dying for! -- sinner that you may be, I never intended for you to go to hell."because of this, Sunday mornings now during the Lenten season we've come to talk about sin. The general series bears the title "The Deadly Sins."

Somewhere along the line Pope Gregory, bless his soul, said people ought to understand that there are sins far more heinous than other sins. I think I know what he means. But I don't think he ever intended any man to permit himself to believe that while some sins are far more heinous than others, that no sin should ever be thought of as something to be taken lightly. Sin is sin. Even though the seemingly insignificant sins that we commit may not seem very important to us, with all the ardor of my soul I must remind you that any sin, no matter how seemingly insignificant, is a step taken in the direction of hell! Sin leads in only one direction -- any kind of sin.

So today the second in the series on the general theme: "Deadly Sins." Last Sunday it was Pride. Today it's AVARICE.....let me say at once: Greed. And the text -- as you might surmise.....

...but first I want to tell you that the text constitutes the words of an older man written to a younger friend. The older chap had gotten around quite a bit. He was a tent-walker by trade, and that meant that as he was working that needle into the canvas or the skin, he could do a great deal of thinking.....he could also do a great deal of listening. He moved around from place to place, from one seaport town to another. He'd stand around in the corner of a bazaar, he'd hear people talking as they bought and they sold. He'd hear

about the problems of fathers and mothers and of youngsters. Out of his experience, student of human nature that he was, the older man wrote a letter to his younger friend, whose name was Timothy.

....Paul in one of his letters, says something about money that he wanted Timothy to understand while he could still benefit by what he was being told:

"The love of money is the root of all evil, (Timothy)-- which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

....that's saying it quite strongly.

And if you think that's put in a rather heavy way, listen to the way my favorite translator, J. B. Phillips, has put it:

"For loving money leads to all kinds of evil, and some men in the struggle to be rich have lost their faith and caused themselves untold agonies of mind."

Now, quite frankly, how do you account for this? I don't want to live without money. Honestly! I don't want to be a penniless preacher, and I'm grateful for every consideration that you give me to keep me from being that. And I can't quite think of your response to the challenge of God without your being able to use money, to give evidence of your concern for the things of God. Maybe the trouble lies in the fact that this is the most mis-quoted text in the Bible. I think I can make a statement as strongly as that -- because usually we say, Money is the root of all evil -- "that just isn't true! Money is also the cause of a lot of good in this world.

I sit down every now and then and thank God for only one thing at that

precise moment that occupies my attention, and that is the unbounded good that has come into my life because of the financial generosity of certain people God has raised up to be as a benefactor to me. And I earnestly pray that as a result of that benefaction I have been able to pass it on to others! Money in itself is not evil.

I can't think of this church existing without money, honestly I can't. There's a very significant part in the worship experience in which everybody shares fully as he may not share in any other part, and that is when, at a certain moment, the men come upon you, and you reach down into your pocketbooks and you put something on the offering plate.....because in the worship experience, very properly so, you use money to express your gratitude to God. It's a useful tool of expression, to indicate to God the gratitude for the fact that you do have something to put on that plate, to indicate to God that you have something left. I can't think of this church carrying on the work of the Lord Jesus Christ without it.

....you say you're concerned with people, the disadvantaged -- all right, they need clothing, they need food, they need to be visited and cared for. They're not dis-membered spirits any more than you're dismembered spirits. They need material things. Material things are made possible by money.....

....you want the Gospel to go into places where you yourself cannot take it, so you have a medical missionary in Liberia, you have the hospital in India. Can they operate without money?

.....so as a concern for the things of the Kingdom of God, we need money.

It isn't money that's the root of all evil. Money, likewise, it can be said, is the source of much good!

But this is a sermon on a Deadly Sin. It's AVARICE....it's Greed -- the love of money which is evil. And I think I know the reason why: because we are peculiarly constituted. Most of us, unless we discipline ourselves, never know when to say "enough." We permit ourselves to believe that it's only as we have a little more that we can be better satisfied and more content. We have never mastered the fine art of saying enough.

I find it increasingly helpful to remember John Wesley for more reasons than one. For the moment, and for the purpose in this sermon, it's the fact that he learned to be content, a contentment that was born of frugality. One year, as a matter of record, he earned 30 pounds -- about 80 American dollars.....two pounds more than he had lived on the earlier year. John Wesley, mind you, made up his mind that if he could live on 28 pounds a year he was going to go on living on 28 pounds a year, and he maintained that as a matter of strict discipline....

....when he earned 30 pounds, 40 pounds, 60 pounds, 120 pounds a year -- he was going to force himself to know that he was never going to become dissatisfied just because he didn't have beyond the basic essentials of life.....and in doing so, of course you know what I am going to tell you, he found himself far more content than any number of people that he could name who were not satisfied with much, much more than he had.....

It's when we no longer are satisfied that we haven't become greedy for more, that the sin of avarice takes of, and it's the love of money that causes us all our ills.

There was a chap one time who was told that he couldn't take it with him, and wit that he was, he said, "Well, if I can't take it with me, I won't go!" ---

without realizing, of course, that our Blessed Lord one time said to a man whose problem here on earth was the ^{wealth} ~~land~~ that he had amassed, and his great concern was to build barns and greater barns to take care of it. And then Jesus said to him, "You're a fool! because tonight your soul will be required of you, and then what about these things?" Of course you can't take it with you, because you don't need it there.

Did it ever occur to you, my friend, that this is the place, here on earth, the only place where we're meant to use money? And the Christian incentive is that it might be used for good, and that he might never forget that he can be made content with less than he may think that he ought to have.

Tolstoi, the Russian, has a marvelous story that I must relate to you now.....

.....a stranger appears to a peasant who is standing alongside of his father's grave. And Tolstoi has the stranger say to the peasant: "It's within my power to give you, before sunset, all the ground that you can cover, from this, the point of your father's grave, and beyond." The young man, caught up by so great a possibility, rushes off immediately with a feverish, hectic pace -- running -- to cover as much ground as he possibly can before sundown....

...there are people standing by the way who see him rushing madly on who offer him something to eat and drink, an opportunity just to sit down and rest and talk about good and beautiful things....but he gives them no heed. He's driven by the covetous desire to get as much as he can before sundown. By mid-day it occurs to him that if he can keep up the same pace, by sundown he'll have in his possession fifteen square miles.....so he rushes on.....

.....just as the final ray of the sun comes over yonder horizon, he's within a foot of his father's grave. The stranger is standing there. The man who had been rushing feverishly all day collâpses, completely exhausted. He dies.

.....and the stranger simply muses, as he looks down at the dead form of the man lying flat on the ground -- "How much ground," says the stranger -- "how much does a man really need? -- six feet by two!"

I would suggest that perhaps nothing outside of Scripture is quite as indicting of the avaricious soul than Tolstoi's story, which I leave with you without further comment.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"Those Deadly Sins -- LUST"

Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son,
our Lord. Amen.

Waiting for the traffic light to change at the busy intersection, waiting for it to change from red to green, can perhaps be just about as short or as long a period of time as you desire to make it. Now don't get me wrong, I'm not about to announce that there's a new electronic device which you can trigger from your own car, which will cause the light to be changed according to your own whim and fancy, regardless of the needs of other people that may have to be met. What I'm about to suggest is this, however, that it is possible to spend your time profitably, thinking about certain things as you wait for the light to change....and then as you engage yourself in thought, lo and behold, before you know it, you have the green light and you can move on.

My friend Paul Miller, of blessed memory, when he used to show me around Silver Spring and environs when I first became your Pastor, would tell me as we would wait for a traffic light at a busy intersection, "Just think," said Paul Miller, "Let's count the number of cars that are stopped right now."

....then with that accountant's mind of his he'd make a complete tally, in a very hurried way, and then he'd suggest that it might be possible to ascertain how much gasoline was being consumed....
....and then he'd probably indicate, as I remember, about how much money was being spent in dollars-and-cents while cars had to wait idly for a traffic light to change from red to green.....

I also remember reading in The LUTHERAN some years back about a writer who indicated that one ought to make the most of any time available to him in the course of the day, and even while he is waiting for the traffic light to change, instead of just sitting there, he ought to pray -- pray for someone in particular, for some thing in particular....

(I would suggest, however, that if you pray under those circumstances, you keep your eyes open lest you be honked and honked at once the light has changed!)

...and surely if one were to pray under those circumstances, he'd be giving heed to the Scriptural injunction that a man should "pray without ceasing."

But while I'm not about to suggest either of these, despite what preference I may have for the latter, I must tell you that when I find myself being delayed at the traffic light up here on Colesville Road, at the intersection of Fenton, my eye is cast and drawn toward the plate glass window at Hecht's. And there I've learned to look at contemporary scribbling, with these four words: "I gotta be me".....

....and as I sit and wait for the light to change, I muse upon these four words: I GOTTA BE ME.....sometimes I get uptight when I think about these words, because I know they're being bandied about quite a bit these days. One hears it from almost any quarter: "Let me be myself! -- let me be myself!"

..."Don't tell me what to do!"

..."Don't try to run my life for me!"

..."Get off my back! Let me be myself!"

Now please understand, I am not against creativity. I'm not against

individuality. I hope by this time you have discovered that I'm a firm proponent of both. But as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as one who at one time or another, ever so frequently in the course of his ministry, has to deal with damaged souls, try to help people pick up the pieces and put them back together in a proper order - - - as one who by the grace of God has wrestled with certain folks, trying to get their lives re-oriented, I know how reckless such a slogan and motto can be. For if by I GOTTA BE ME you permit yourself to believe that you can completely ignore and disregard any sign-posts along the way, you could be letting yourself in for untold grief.

If ever I was proud of the youth of this parish, I had reason to be when some weeks ago I sat there at some distance and heard a visiting speaker tell them how they ought not to allow anybody to stand in their way in their attempt to self-expression.....

....as they responded to that speaker, either directly or among themselves, I gratefully acknowledged that they were putting a high value upon the necessity for a sense of direction..... So I would say with all the ardor of my soul, if "I gotta be me" -- let me recognize, then, that there is the possibility of different "me." The 'me' that I've got to be could either be a good 'me' or a bad 'me,' because man is so made that he can be either apish or angelic. There is always the possibility of the wicked.....there is always the possibility of the good.

Henry James has said, "Allow me to inform you of what really is a universal secret, that within every single one of us, at some time or another, there is the desire to stray far on the wrong road." Nor am I forgetting that when God came to this earth in the form of Jesus Christ, one of the

things that God had in mind was to show us how it's absolutely possible for us to become the sons of God, as over against remaining the sons of Adam.

In one Scripture lesson after another that's read in the course of the year we're being admonished to become the children of Light, and not to walk as the children of Darkness. The Apostle Paul was quite a chap. He was not at first a preacher, you know. It was only later on that he felt the claim of God upon his soul, so that wherever he went he introduced the God-factor and proclaimed the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Something of a man-of-the-world, he moved freely among the people of the world. As I've already told you, he listened to their conversations, he observed them in their folly, in their stupidity, in their wickedness. Once he wrote a letter to a group of Christians who lived in the city of Rome. And what he had to say in that letter constitutes the text for today's sermon: the 13th and the 14th ~~chaps~~ verses of the 13th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans.

The text for this sermon, which is another in the series of sermons on "The Deadly Sins" - - - and today it's the deadly sin of "LUST". Fortunately there are contemporary translations, such as the one of J. B. Phillips, which makes crystal clear for us what the writer had in mind originally, when he wrote in his day:

"Let's live cleanly, as in the daylight, not in the delights of getting drunk or playing with sex, nor yet in quarreling or jealousies. Let us be Christ's men from head to foot, and give no chances to the flesh to have its fling."

Now don't blame the preacher, and don't blame J. B. Phillips if you don't quite understand what the Apostle Paul was trying to say in that text. It's

crystal clear. For when a man becomes a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ he knows that he was not meant to follow his evil impulses. Evil impulses he will get, evil desires we will have. None has ever been as perfect as that, as to be free from evil desire. Don't ask me how we got that way, I only know that we are -- and despite a man's noblest intentions, somewhere, somehow and in some way or another, the choice is always in front of you -- to be ape-like, or to be angelic.

Says the Apostle Paul, Why don't we as Christians come clean -- why don't we make the decision, then, not to allow the lust of the flesh to be satisfied? And what is it to lust after something? -- it's to have this craving, this desire for sensual satisfaction, to exploit a thing or a person for self-gratification and gratification alone. For our purpose this morning it is decidedly a sin of the flesh. When a man or a woman uses another person for only one purpose and one purpose alone, lust becomes the ugliest of all sins, because it is simply exploitation.

"I gotta be me" - - - that's the clarion cry -- "Let my desire be satisfied, no matter when or how or regardless of the price that has to be paid - - "

...I'm not about to preach to people any more that they're going to be punished for their sins -- I think life determines for us that we are punished by our sins. And that is the thing that makes the sin of lust so ugly and so deadly. God has so made us that when we lust after something, we reach the point where we no longer experience genuine satisfaction, if ever there was any indication of it at all. When will people understand that sex wears off! -- when it's sex for sex's sake....when it's simply self-gratification. There is such a thing in a man's sinning which becomes surfeiting, and pure unmitigated, unadulterated satiation.

Don't you believe Nietzsche when somebody took him to task and said, "You walk among people as though they were animals" - - Nietzsche countered them one better and said, "I walk among them as animals!" --- and if it is an original sin, said the German philosopher, it's the sin of having people tell you that you should deny yourself, you ought not to repress yourself, you should have your fling.

Oscar Wilde said a dammable thing when Oscar Wilde said, "The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it." If you're not ~~going to~~ satisfied with the Scriptural justification for the truth that I'm trying to share with you, let me quote, calling to the witness stand Lord Byron who had not even reached middle age, who should have been in the prime of youth or just being introduced to it, when through a life of dissipation and permissiveness, spoke these words that none of us ought ever to forget,

"My days are in the yellow leaf; the flowers and the fruits of love are gone. The worm, the canker and the grief are mine alone."

.....these are the words of a man who allowed himself to be lustful.

These Sunday mornings as we come together, please don't misunderstand me, as hard as I must come down on the fact of sin. I would be as compassionate as I possibly can with the sinner. None of us perhaps can fully understand how difficult it is for some people in their attempt to be good. But what may be your sin may not be my sin, and what may be my sin would never appeal to you at all. But the fact remains, to every man there comes at one time or another, as James has said, the strong desire to travel far, on the wrong road.

Was I watching with you as you were watching last night "All In The

Family"? And when Archie finds himself boxed into a corner, remembering a chapter in his life, rather reluctantly he admits that he didn't know where he was going, and before he knew it he was there. That's why a man must always be on guard against all the possible doors that are being opened up to him in life. That's why a man must always be on guard, and with all the ardor of my soul I would say this to those who are young: Be careful how many ~~fences~~ fences you take down, until you first learn why they were put up!

For the Christian there is always an alternative, of course:

"- - to live cleanly, as in the daylight"

...and says the Apostle Paul:

"to put on the garment of the Lord Jesus Christ
and not to make any provision to satisfy the lust
of the flesh."

And it's with that thought that I would leave you. Herein perhaps is our greater problem - - - we have the inclination to keep looking for some crack in the door, and longingly we feast upon the desire to enter forbidden territory.

* * * *

(this sermon transcribed as recorded)

Extra thought:

John Fiske - - "Every temptation that is resisted -- every noble aspiration that is encouraged, every sinful thought that is repressed, every bitter word that is withheld, adds its impetus to that great movement which is tending toward a richer life and higher character."

"Those Deadly Sins -- ANGER"

GRACE, mercy and peace from God
our Father, and from His Son, Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Says one character to another in a Broadway play, "Just look at us! Here we are, the only animals upon whom God has given the gift of speech, and we sit here animal-like, snarling at each other!" Man has the possibility, you see, of always becoming animal-like, and when he does, chances are he'll snarl sooner or later.

It could be that Pope Gregory had this in mind when he was thinking of the sins of man, and he began to catalog -- and he decided that of all the sins known to the soul of man, there were at least seven that could be classified as deadly sins. And when the Holy Father made up his mind as to what would be included and ought to be excluded, the decision was his that anger would be classified as a deadly sin.

You know what we have been doing now these Sunday mornings during Lent -- we've been talking about the so-called deadly sins. But let me say again what needs to be said: you may classify certain sins as deadly sins but this is never to permit a man to think that other sins are not to be taken seriously. Any sin, no matter how insignificant it may appear to you, is still a sin, and surely any sin, in the sight of God if not in your sight, is a step taken in the direction of Hell. Sin leads in only one direction.

This morning we come in our series to the consideration of another of

the deadly sins. Today it's the sin of anger. There is a text -- of course there's a text -- from the letter that Paul wrote to Christians who lived in the city of Ephesus.....in that 4th chapter he has the 26th verse that reads like this:

"Be angry, but do not sin."

As I read this text and as I think of what Paul had to say about anger, I am somewhat confused momentarily, because here it seems to me that Paul is dealing with a bit of double-talk. There's no question about this text:

"Be angry, but do not sin . . . "

...and only a few verses away he goes on to talk about the absolute necessity for a man, once he's become a Christian, to get rid of some of his sins. But when he talks in that vein he says: "Give up anger -- ". What now is a preacher to do, particularly when he is charged with the responsibility to deliver a sermon upon a deadly sin called anger? On one hand the Apostle Paul says, "Be angry, but do not sin".....on the other hand he says, "Give up anger -- get rid of it!"

And if that's not enough to throw a preacher, he finds himself now confused by the word and the deed of Jesus Christ. You may remember that on occasion Jesus Christ stood up and preached that wonderful sermon in which He described Christian character. And when He was talking about Christian character He said something about "people ought to be meek" - - - now that's far from being an enangered person! - - -

"people should be meek," said Jesus Christ in that wonderful sermon.....and then He went on so far as to say that the world belongs to the meek. Now that's what He said....

....now as over against that, some

of us have a way of remembering what He did, when one day He walked into the Temple and became absolutely infuriated, and with physical force drove money-changers from the Temple. This was not a 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild' -- it was a carpenter's son who was bring down upon those who happened to be near Him the very wrath of God.

In your reading of the Old Testament one comes upon page after page in which God is revealed to him as an angry God. Now what should I do?

...well, that was my question, you see, when I went to develop this sermon. Going back to the Apostle Paul, he allows us to believe that becoming angry is an accepted thing for a Christian! So I'm going to stop at that point and tell you, I believe it too. I wouldn't give two cents for a man who on occasion didn't become infuriated. I'd go so far as to say that I think you can draw the measure of a man's character by the things that make him angry. Says the Apostle Paul: "Go on -- be angry, but do not sin." The historian undoubtedly is able to go back and assess what's gone before and bring to our attention that here and there a giant-like stride, or maybe only an inch, in the direction of social justice was made possible because somewhere there loomed upon the horizon of time a mad man, who could not sleep because of the injustice round about him -- would not allow other people to sleep until the injustice was corrected.

When I was a lad in school my first introduction to the basic character of Abraham Lincoln was when I read a text that told me that Abraham Lincoln once saw a human being taken to a block, an auction block, and he was sold, this human being, to the highest bidder....then he was taken away to be to this man as a slave. Said the writer of that text, "Abraham Lincoln observed, and you can almost hear the thunder in his voice and see the fire in his

eyes: 'If ever I get a chance to hit that thing, I will hit it and hit it hard!'" This is the language of the stance of an infuriated man.

I think I must tell you with all the ardor of my soul that in the time of Judgment, Christ, who is the great King and Head of the Church may hold this congregation responsible for the things for which it fails to display any kind of anger at all -- the social injustices that remain around about us to which we may show no sensitivity at all, and of all the people who are going to Hell, with whom we associate -- and we have no enthusiasm at all to fight the Devil on his ground, to become infuriated by the progress that the Devil is making. Without any hesitation I salute the man who has the quality of becoming infuriated at evil.

One of the very wise things said last Wednesday night when we had our discussion time in Eieber Hall was spoken by one of the panelists, in which he observed that in our day it's been said that we've become so tolerant of evil, that presumably the only thing that we don't tolerate in our day is virtue! Says the Apostle Paul, "Be angry, but be sure you are angry at the right thing!" - - "Be sure you're angry for the right reason!"

Did it ever occur to you, as I am sure it does not occur to me, that there are times when you and I become angry because we have been hurt, our pride has suffered a blow. Be angry - - - but be sure you are angry for the right reason.....

....some of us are disturbed when we can't have
our own way....

....some of us are disturbed when other people can't
see what we are trying to accomplish...so we get angry.

We contribute little good to the situation, then, by our becoming angry, and

particularly if we become infuriated because our pride has been hurt.

What now is there wrong with the sin of anger? Maybe it can be said that when a man becomes angry without cause (that qualifying phrase has to be spoken immediately) -- he runs the risk not only of losing control of himself, and becoming blind, but he also runs the risk of losing control of the situation. The example of Jesus Christ remains: He became infuriated but you cannot say that He lost control of that situation in the Temple. He remained the master of it -- from a purely human point of view. Much of the unsettlement of the 60's, you see, when we failed to cope with it, stemmed from the fact that we never quite mastered the art of 'keeping our cool'...and by 'keeping our cool' we remain in charge. But when a man's temper gets the best of him, he runs the risk of not only losing control of himself but of losing control of the situation as well.

Maybe the only corrective that we say ever get for the sin of anger is when we see ourselves as the fools we become when we become angry without a cause. I am constrained to tell you the story of Sinbad. Do you remember it at all?...

....he and a company of cohorts were hungry, and they decided that there was a yonder cocoanut grove, and if only they could get some of the cocoanuts, they'd satisfy their appetite. But none among them was about to scale the cocoanut palm to get the cocoanuts, so they did the next-best thing, of course -- they picked up the sticks and the stones and they threw them, hoping to dislodge the cocoanuts...

...but now up in the cocoanut tree were some monkeys.

The monkeys, believing themselves to be molested by human beings down below, became infuriated by the sticks and the stones that were being

thrown.....so they reacted, and plucked the coconuts that were within their grasp, and threw them down. Sinbad and his friends got exactly what they wanted....

....but the monkeys made real
monkeys of themselves....

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"Those Deadly Sins -- ENVY"

Grace, mercy and peace from God
our Father and from his Son,
Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Some years back there was a play entitled "Family Portrait." The main character, as I understand it, was Mary, the mother of our Blessed Lord. She is portrayed as one who is deeply aggrieved and distraught because she just can't get over the terrible shock that her first-born, Jesus, should have been crucified. She perhaps more than any other person on this earth knew him in a way that others did not know him. Even the Scriptures record how she pondered and kept certain things in her heart, the implication being that she had an insight and an understanding that others could never have known. And now Jesus, her first-born, is dead.....not only dead, but having died the kind of death that he did.

Later on in the play she learns that the youngest son in the family has become a father, and she goes to this brother of Jesus, and she says to him, as timidly as she can, having due and proper regard for his individuality, that maybe it might seem reasonable to him to call this child after Jesus, because, says Mary, "I don't want him to be forgotten"...

....and as she says that she goes to a window,
having lighted a candle, standing there full of
thought, and the shadow of the cross falls upon
the floor....

Mary, your request was never necessary. Your Son, our Blessed Lord, will always be remembered. He will never be forgotten. For as long as men reverently think the thoughts of Jesus Christ, somewhere the shadow of a cross will

fall. For men thinking of Jesus Christ will be haunted by the way He died. That's one reason why He's remembered.

John Milton, however, in 1629, meditating upon the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ, endeavored to write something call the "Passion." He got only so far. It was beyond his understanding. Whether he was deeply grieved or not, I cannot tell you, but at any rate, to this very day in the unfinished works of Milton, you will find something call the "Passion," and associated with it, his sentiment in his own handwriting: "The writer, having undertaken this task, found it well beyond his understanding and his years. He has left it unfinished." So it is with many of us even in our day, when we meditate upon the crucifixion. It doesn't make sense to us -- we can't quite figure out how God would allow it to happen, and we can't quite believe that man could be as wicked as all that, as to kill the very Son of God!

Whether we can understand it or not, we walk away from the cross and one way or another the truth is imbedded in us: He was crucified for our sins. It was the sinful nature of man that caused Jesus Christ to be rejected. You cannot think of the crucifixion without thinking of the sins of men. You and I can never talk about the death of Jesus Christ without talking about our sinful nature.....and that means that you and I can never take sin lightly. Small reason, then, why for these Sunday mornings during Lent we have come together to talk about something that's classified as "Deadly Sins."

The series now has practically run its course. Already we've talked about Pride and Avarice, and Lust and Anger. Today it's the sin of "ENVY." Sloth and Gluttony, the other two of the seven deadly sins, will have to wait for some other time. But let me tell you that the sin of envy falls in a category all of its own. Because as one reads the 27th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, he's forced to recognize that this was the sin

that caused the people to drive the nails through the flesh of Jesus Christ very fiercely.....that this was the sin, more than any other, directly related to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The Gospel writer, Matthew, in his 27th chapter, says "It was for envy that they delivered him."

Does that make sense to you? Had you ever for a moment thought that this was the sin of sins? -- and helped bring about the death of Jesus Christ? -- the sin of envy?

Well let's look at it this way for what it may be worth: Pontius Pilate, the Governor, was a realist. He had to be that way to hold his position. He tried to figure out in his own mind just why it was that they wanted this innocent man killed. It's a matter of Scriptural record that Pontius Pilate said, "I don't find any fault in him.".....and then with whatever time he had to think, and to reflect, he tried to ascertain the earthly motivations that were involved in all of this interplay -- why should these people, people especially of his own kind, why should they want him killed?.....

....then, I think with some degree of a flashing light, it occurred to Pontius Pilate: "I know exactly why they want to do it -- they can't stand his success, for his success will bring about their ruin!"

....that's a reference, you see, to the leaders in the Temple, that's a reference to the established leaders of the church in his day. Jesus Christ, a few days earlier than when these words were spoken by Pontius Pilate, looked back and perhaps was forced to realize that Jesus Christ came into the royal city in a triumphal entry.....multitudes had gone wild, proclaiming "Hosanna to the son of David -- blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

....then somewhere in the course of the

week, this same man goes into the Temple, and with force drives out the money-changers. And the established church leadership can take this no longer -- he is definitely a threat to them. If he succeeds, they will be ruined. They've had something mighty good going for them....

....they were pretty well established in their leadership.....they had the masses pretty well where they wanted them, even though they dealt with them corruptly.....

.....so Pontius Pilate -- no man's fool -- discovers this very down-to-earth motivation: it's for envy that they're doing this!

Whether Pontius Pilate was aware of it or not, I cannot tell you, but I think he must have sensed that from that moment on there wasn't a thing that he could do. Because of all the sins, envy is the one that leads to hate, and hate has a twin vice called jealousy. And these together become as the cancer of the soul. And they eat a man's heart away --

"It was for envy that they delivered Jesus Christ."

Envy is not only the sin most directly related to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, it is also, if you please, the last sin that we're about to give up. Would you believe it -- we might succeed fairly well in conquering lust.....we might be able to bring our temper under control.....we might be able to become less greedy than we have been....

....but to the day a man

breathes his last, chances are he'll always be a bit unsettled if somebody else is getting along a little bit better than he is. Down deep inside of us there's always this troublesome aspect, to see somebody else fare in life better than we do. Whether it's this inbred desire on our

part to succeed and to be advanced, I cannot tell you. I only know that it is the point in a man's life, perhaps, where he remains forever vulnerable.

The story is told of a very wonderful person. When people spoke of him, they spoke with reverence and respect. There were those who said "Why, he's wellnigh perfect!" He was a humble priest of the Roman Catholic Church in the Mediterranean area. Then one day there was somebody who said, "But he has a weak spot, and some day I'll find it" --

...and would you believe it, the man who said these words devised a strategy, and he came to the humble priest and he said, "I've just heard that your brother, who is also a priest, has just been named a Bishop.".....and that's all that it took -- the look of envy immediately came to his eyes. The man who up to that moment had himself under perfect control now visibly was emotionally troubled..... Envy is such a subtle sin, and yet has its damning effect immediately.

One of the old saints, according to a legend, in his journey overtook two travelers. One was a greedy, avaricious, covetous man.....the other was of a jealous and envious nature. When they came to the parting of the ways, the saint said, "I'll give you a parting gift" -- whichever made a wish first would have his wish fulfilled....and then the other man would get a double portion of what the first had asked for...

....now the greedy man knew what he wanted. But he was afraid to make his wish because he wanted a double portion and could not bear the thought of his companion getting twice as much as he...

...but the envious man was also unwilling to make his wish first, because he could not stand the idea of his companion getting twice as much as he would get.....

So each waited for the other to wish first.

At length, the greedy man took his fellow by the throat and said, "I will choke you to death unless you make your wish first"...and then the envious man said, "Very well -- I will make my wish. I wish to be made blind -- in one eye." Immediately he lost the sight of his eye....and his companion went blind in both eyes. So Avarice, and its companion Envy, blind and curse the soul of man. The sin of envy made man so blind to the goodness of God that Jesus Christ was crucified.

Now since this is the final sermon in the series I am in duty bound to tell you the Apostle Peter once wrote a letter to some Christians. And while he recognized the fact that Christians might always remain as sinners, yet a Christian ought to do what he could to get rid of his sins. And he said: "He ought to put them off, as a man puts off an old garment." Hence, the text for this sermon, the 1st verse of the 2nd chapter of I Peter:

"So put away all malice, and all guile,
and insincerity, and envy."

But I know exactly what you're thinking, you see -- how in the world can I put away my sins by myself? That's why God gives us the Holy Spirit, to empower and to motivate us, to have done with our sinning. And that's why the Holy Spirit also encourages us to follow a better way, to earnestly desire to love, and to wish a brother well, than to envy his good fortune and first to think ill of him.

And I will conclude with a very simple story. Said the one to the other: "Do you see that?" -- as his attention was called to a shiny, brand new automobile, the latest model -- a handsome car at that -- quite expensive. "The man got that car because his brother gave it to him!" 99 people out of a hundred might say, "I wish I had a brother like that!".....this man said, "I wish I could be a brother like that!"

(transcribed as recorded)

....there's quite a difference!

[Perhaps it would. The Italian painter Giotto has a picture of Envy -- a being set on malicious gossip, eager to hear anything bad about a worthier neighbor; and so he is portrayed as having large, distended ears. He is greedy; and therefore he clutches a bag of gold with one hand, and reaches out with the other, his fingers sharpened to claws. He is poisonous in cunning; and so a serpent springs from his mouth; and since slander always defames the slanderer, the fangs of the serpent fasten on Envy's own brow.]

"SOMEBODY CARES"

There is a dynamic quality in the thrust of a single spoken word. Let a bunch of rascals be gathered together, inclined on some mischief, and someone has only to yell one word "Scram!".....and immediately they'll begin to scatter. There is a dynamic quality in the thrust of a single spoken word.

....let a man be walking down the street, or perhaps turning the corner, and all of a sudden there in front of him he's encountered by a perfectly charming lady. It could be the look in the eye...it most certainly could be the dynamic quality of the thrust of a single spoken word, as she simply says, "Hello".....and from that moment things can begin to happen.....

I suggest to you this morning that the meaning of Easter can be found in the quality, the dynamic thrust, of a single spoken word. Retrace our steps quickly, please. There were two women in the life of our Lord who loved Him as no one else quite loved Him. They loved Him dearly. One was Mary, the mother of our Blessed Lord. And the other, significantly enough by the same name, Mary, the Magdalen. They were found at the foot of the cross, keeping the vigil. Drawn by love, they could not be kept away from the Resurrection garden.

Jesus Christ had come into the life of Mary the Magdalene and had transformed her -- because love always brings a transforming touch -- and He had introduced into her life the eternal dimension. He had marked indelibly upon the fabric of her heart the fact of God. Other men had loved her -- for what

she could do for them. Jesus Christ alone loved her for what He could do for her.

She had never known a love like this. It's the nature of love to believe that life goes on, as love goes on, and that is why Mary could not be kept from the Resurrection Garden. They said He was dead. They said they had put Him in the grave. But Mary, transformed by divine love, could not get herself to believe that this was the end. Love does not deal in endings. The characteristic of love is continuation. Love always believes in a tomorrow! Love always believes in another chapter! So bewildered and confused as she might have been, Mary came to the Resurrection Garden --- and there, if you will, the miracle of Easter took place.....with Jesus Christ standing there....

...not performing a miracle by cursing those who
had killed Him....

...not bringing down legions from heaven to drive
into the sea His persecutors....

...not by snapping His divine fingers, bringing
sight to a blind man, or enabling a crippled boy
to walk.....

...but the miracle of Easter occurs in the dynamic thrust of a single spoken word - - - as Jesus Christ, Lord and giver of life and Master, looks upon Mary and calls her by name.

What is there, my friend, that you consider unique in your understanding of the basic nature and character of God? You are a Christian. What is it that a Christian understands about God. A Christian is not the only person

who believes in God. Many, many non-Christians believe in the fact of God. But what is there unique in our understanding of the fact of God. We remind ourselves of what we were taught about God as boys and girls in Sunday School. We had a three-word definition for God: God is love. And we said, that's the whole story about God. One day in God's plan for us He Himself came in the form of a human being. God incarnate is Love incarnate. No one ever loved the way Jesus Christ loved....divinely.....perfectly....completely...sacrificially. So Mary, possessed by that love, is drawn to the Resurrection Garden. He must appear again! Again she must hear His voice! Again the relationship must be established. It was never meant to have its day, and then to disappear. Love never puts on a disappearing act. God, who is Love, is always appearing and re-appearing. And the marvel of it all is, you never quite know where and how He might appear again. But appear He will! That was the transforming touch that came to the world as it came to a bewildered and confused woman named Mary.

They tell me that this is the Age of the Electronic Computer. They tell me that our age will be transformed by the electronic computer as no age in history has ever been transformed. What wonders are wrought by the computer....

...they run supermarkets by computers...

...a physician can diagnose an illness at some distance from his patient, thanks to electronic devices....

...the Penn Central Railroad can find one lost car on some isolated siding -- one car among thousands upon thousands, thanks to the computer....

....up in the 'hills of home' when we need something from the local village hardware store, we go down, we ask for it -- the clerk says, "Just a moment, I'm sorry, we don't

have it, but just a moment, please"....he disappears....then he comes back quickly -- thanks to a computerized device he can tell us when I can get it -- when the delivery can be expected, and what the price is going to be when we do get it, and what the condition of the merchandise will be, and from what lot it is going to be taken.....

TIME magazine, as far back as 1944, said that one computer, in an hour's time, can do as much work as a Yankee Stadium filled with scientists could accomplish in a lifetime! Technologically, the computer might bring its transforming touch. Man, basically, is not a technocratic thing. He is a human being who is the object of God's love. There are some things yet that a computer can never, never do. As one wise man said, "A computer can never take a child by the hand and direct his eyes heavenward and introduce to him the marvel of the stars and the sky." That dear soul, in an English village, who went to the post office only to learn that it had just been automated.....and she simply exclaimed to the postmaster: "This may be very good, sir, to have this automation in the post office now, but pray tell, who's going to ask me about my rheumatism?"

It's the nature and character of love to meet a need. It's the nature and character of love to be personally interested. So the miracle of Easter occurs when God comes in the form of Jesus Christ, and calls a woman by name.

If you wanted a sub-title for this Easter sermon today, I'd call it "Somebody Cares." And that Somebody who cares is God. God who is love looks upon every single one of us as an object of His love, and nothing, absolutely nothing, can ever cut asunder the bond of love between God and us.

The dynamic quality which is the thrust of a single spoken word -- God who is love, who never forgets a face, who never forgets a name, who never forgets a need that has to be met.....calls Mary by name. And she begins to live all over again!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"LIKE A LOST SHEEP"

Grace, Mercy and Peace from
God our Father and from His
Son, Jesus Christ our Blessed
Lord, be with you all. Amen.

Most sermons, much as ancient Gaul, are divided into three parts. This sermon, however, is an exception. It's to be divided in two parts. And in the preparation of this sermon I couldn't quite make up my mind as to which part ought to be given first. I would hope that each part might be presented with equal strength and equal integrity, and that once the sermon has been preached, you might recognize the fact that the two parts constitute a whole, that the one can never be seen apart from the other.

Now let's begin with the first part.

The first part deals with the basic theme that the God who is revealed to us in Jesus Christ is a God of love, a God who continually cares, a God who never turns His back upon us. God's love remains constant. It is not dependent upon our pattern of behavior. No matter how well we behave, no matter how we misbehave, God is still a God of love.

This also must be said about this God who is revealed to us in Jesus Christ: that He is an all-knowing God, a God who knows all about us, who knows what we have been, who is fully aware of all the temptations that come upon us in the present moment, and who is fully aware of all the things that lie ahead. When His Son, our Blessed Lord, was here on earth, He was able to tell Peter every now and then exactly what Peter was going to do, even

before Peter did it! On one occasion He met a man who became His disciple, and only after He met him, He told him what he had been up to before He met him. Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord, revealed in His relationship with people here on earth this fundamental truth about the basic nature and character of God: He is an all-knowing and an all-seeing God.

I continue to draw much benefit from Psalm 139, the Psalm that perhaps Jesus may have memorized as a youth. In that 139th Psalm the writer is telling us how, no matter where you may go on the face of the earth, or if you were to ascend up into the heavens, God would be already there -- you could never escape Him. He even said this about God -- that he believed that even before he was made, as the Psalmist put it: even before he was delivered from his mother's womb, God knew all about him!

Now having said all of this, is it being clearly established in your mind that this God who knows all about ~~us~~ is still a God of love and a God who continually cares?

....a God who knows all about us is fully aware of the fact
that we will be prone to stray....

....a God who knows all about us knows in advance that we
may take the wrong road -- He takes that into account.
That's quite a thing to say about God. And even after we've said that, to admit that He's made up His mind that He'll never turn His back against us.

Are you aware of the fact that there is something about human nature, down ~~deep~~ inside of us, that seems to encourage us with a desire to take the wrong road, and to travel as far on that wrong road as we can. That's quite a thing to say about us. Most of us would like to believe that we are free from this kind of inclination. But we're never completely free from the

risk. One thing that can be said about human nature is this -- if the desire has not already come, then one day it most certainly will, for a man to stray far on the wrong road.

You and I look back across the years of our life and we have to admit, in sober moments of reflection, that the record isn't quite as good as we wish that it might have been. There's a reason for it. We are as sheep who have gone astray. That leads me to the text for both sides of today's sermon. It's the last verse of the longest Psalm in the Bible -- Psalm 119 goes on for 175 verses, then it comes finally to the 176th verse which reads this way:

"I have gone astray like a lost sheep;
seek thy servant,
for I do not forget thy commandments."

So you have been a Christian, have you? How long? Twenty years, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty? How goes it by this time? What does the progress chart show to date? Could be that most of us would have to admit that we've not fared nearly as well as we'd hoped. Old prejudices remain and new temptations strike crippling blows. It isn't that we want it to be as bad as all that, but we're off course. How so? Could it be that as sheep we've simply gone astray?

Now there are two things that I think I can tell you.

One is, that those of us who work with other people should always make an allowance for this fact. We should never go on the assumption that anyone with whom we have to deal will always stay on the straight and narrow path. I'm grateful that when I came to you as your Pastor in 1956, that I came without a 'barrel of sermons.'because, you see, I'm completely free from the temptation to dig back into the barrel and draw upon some

concept to which I held at that time -- which perchance would not hold us in good stead today! Quite frankly, the sermon that I'm preaching to you today I could never have preached twenty years ago, or seventeen years ago. The sermon that I'm preaching to you this morning I preach from the vantage-point of a man who has had the rare privilege to be a shepherd of souls for more than three decades....who is not only a father, now, but a grandfather, and who knows what it is to wrestle with parents who have to deal with problems of a teenager. How I wish I might have said to some folks twenty years ago - - "Please -- understand! -- there has to be some slackening

of the reins -- of necessity there has to be some opportunity for the person to fail!....there must come moments when you have to get off their back! withdraw just a little bit! Permit, even though you may be unwilling to do it, the measure of freedom that has to be allowed for the lessons that only life can teach!

....when God made us, God endowed us with that measure of freedom. God has His waiting moments. If ever you wanted to paint or draw a picture of God, never underestimate the necessity of painting Him and picturing Him as a waiting God.....who simply waits and waits until His children have had done with their folly, have had done with their stupidity, and then turned back and thank Him for the wisdom which had been offered, even though they had not recognized it or followed it.

God, who knows all about us, is a God of love, who recognizes from the very beginning that He made us, and when He made us this way, He ran the risk of seeing us go astray!

The second thing that I can tell you from my vantage-point of these years in the ministry is: that not everyone who goes astray, strays on the wrong road. He can be recovered....he can be redeemed. There is always this possibility. What we know about God revealed to us in Jesus Christ establishes it as a principle clear in our minds. We do not understand the Christian Gospel unless we understand always the possibility of redemption, being restored, and re-directed. And to that end even God says, "I myself will come to accomplish this, if that's the only way it will be accomplished."

Now having told you all of this, I must also say that one of the characters of recent time who has left a mark upon my soul as perhaps none other has has been Roman Catholicism's portly Pope John 23rd -- that grand and good man, of all mankind, who identified so well with the family of man. In the fullness of his years of experience, with nothing but the priest's heart, the heart of a good shepherd, the bishop and guardian of the souls of people, he said, as he looked upon his relationship with other people, three things that we would do well to remember:

-- see a great deal

-- correct a little

-- and forget much!

That should hold all of us in good stead, for the simple reason that a lot of us never quite have done with somebody else's past. Even though they have been redeemed, we go on remembering them as they once had been. It's not enough that they should be haunted by the sadness of their past, let alone for us to go on reminding them of it.

And now what have I told you so far in chapter one of a two-chapter sermon?

God is. And God loves. And God continually cares. And despite our stupidity and our folly and our wickedness, God never turns His back upon us.....even though we may be like sheep who go astray.

Sheep are frequently characterized as being dumb. It's the only time that I know that that descriptive is given to an animal. A neighbor of ours back in the hills of home one time decided to raise some sheep. He was infuriated and became impatient with them because they were entirely too dumb to know how to use the shelter that he had provided for them in the time of a storm. God says, "I am your good shepherd." Dumb as we are, He still says, "I am your shepherd."

Now the other side of the coin.

Even though we can be redeemed, and even though we are being redeemed, the truth remains: even God cannot cancel out the consequences of our wickedness. Stray as we may, the results of our stupidity, our folly and our wickedness remain. We may learn to profit by our emotional scars, but the scars cannot be canceled out, even by God. This is the pathetic thing that I have to tell you. I will not represent my God, even though He is a God of love, as anything less than a God of justice. And life has a way of making us pay the price, whatever may have been the reason why we committed the stupid thing. God may raise up good and stalwart bolds who will deal with us with compassion in the face of our indiscretion and woo us back to the right way, but at the same time the error of our ways, with its resultant misfortune, remains.

I'm indebted to Frank Norzee, a distinguished Australian Methodist preacher of another generation, who provides me with an insight on the

Prodigal Son that I had never understood until I read his essay. He tells us that it's a grand and good thing to portray the waiting father as the rejoicing one, who kills the fatted calf, who welcomes back the prodigal, permits music and dancing. He says, "God is like this, there's no question about that - - "

...but, he says, there was also a place in the world where there was no music and dancing, there was no rejoicing at the sound of the name of the prodigal son. The old man, the waiting father, might have become happy because his son turned back and saw the error of his ways.....but what about the the people in the far country? what about the fathers of the daughters whose virtue had been taken away by the prodigal who became the rascal in the far country?....what about the young teenagers who thought he was big stuff, and idolized his pattern of behavior -- how he ruined their lives.....

Frank Boreham said, there may have been rejoicing in the old man's home, but there was never rejoicing in the far country, where the consequences of the man's folly still had to be dealt with.....

....I would do my God a disservice if I simply told you He was a God of love, who continually cares for us, no matter how far we may stray. I must also tell you that life itself requires that the full price be paid.

Now I want to read for you before I close some poetry -- not much, as poetry goes -- no English teacher would accept it as much of a piece of poetry, but it's being read because of the truth it contains:

"'Twas a sheep not a lamb that strayed away
In the parable Jesus told;
A grown-up sheep had gone astray
From the 99 in the fold.

Out on the hillside, out in the cold,
'Twas a sheep the good shepherd sought,
And back to the flock, safe into the fold,
'Twas a sheep the Good Shepherd brought.

And why for the sheep should we earnestly long?
And as earnestly hope and pray?
Because there is danger if they go wrong,
They will lead the lambs astray.

For the lambs will follow the sheep, you know,
Wherever the sheep may stray;
When the sheep go wrong, it will not take long
Till the lambs are as wrong as they.

And so with the sheep we earnestly plead
For the sake of the lambs today;
If the lambs are lost, what a terrible cost
Some sheep will have to pay."

I went to see the musical "Oliver." I was intrigued by the intriguer, Fagin -- quite a rascal. He made it his business to get young kids and train them in the art of pickpocketing. He succeeded very well. He took a measure of pride in his best pupil, who was known of course as "The Artful Dodger."

Now, near the end of the musical our hopes become high because Fagin is reviewing the situation. And it seems as though he's about to see the error of his ways and mend his path, to make a right turn in the road. And we're very happy in this prospect, that a man should desire to make a change. But lo and behold, who'd expect it! Just as he's about to make the turn in the road he's confronted by his prize pupil -- the Artful Dodger, who becomes his temptation all over again. Fagin never makes it. And the two of them, the Artful Dodger and Fagin, go on their way, bent once more on evil.

It's a frightening thing, isn't it -- terribly frightening. Maybe I

should have preached the first part of the sermon last.....maybe it doesn't make any difference. You've gotten both sides now. Maybe in the rest of the day you'll try to balance them out.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TO MAKE THE EFFORT"

GRACE, MERCY and peace from God our
Father, and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Up to about twelve years ago, you may remember, for the most part when people came to worship in Saint Luke Church, they entered through the red doors. And when the service was over, that's the way they made their exit.

Then we were able to purchase the property at 1000 Dale Drive and develop a parking area up there....then after that, the corner lot at the intersection of Dale Drive and Colesville Road. This meant eventually, and properly so, what had been a back door, seldom used, now became something of a front door, through which, to this day, fully two-thirds of our people enter and leave.

Now this posed something of a problem - - for when a service was over, immediately outside this door to my right there would be congestion. Was it caused by people leaving the Nave?....or by people coming up from Bisher Hall?or by people coming down from the second floor of the Christian Education Building? It may have been one of these, all of them together, plus more.

Well, to face the problem we made the entrance area on the Colesville Road side of the church, Christian Education Building, as attractive as we could. We improved it. We put in glass panels, there's glass etching there, with symbols.....and then it occurred to us that maybe people would see the wisdom of being able to get out of the congestion by using the porch entrance or

exit, coming down the sidewalk this way, to the lot across the way, or to the lower part of the Dale Drive lot....or now currently, since we're able to use Mrs. K's parking lot, use the sidewalk to go in that direction. But it could be today, as last Sunday and the Sunday before that, and maybe next Sunday too, there'll still be congestion out there.

Interestingly enough, with the grand and good man Ellwood DeLong, he wanted us to suggest the words from Scripture that could be etched into glass, and the panels directly above the double doors that lead into the enclosed porch, what did we suggest? - - the words of Jesus Christ: "I am the way, the truth and the life."

...but somehow, for some reason or other, the words have never caught on as far as people entering or leaving in that particular manner.

Now all of this is a parable. When our Blessed Lord was here on earth he found people mingling and milling around in little groups. Even in that day there was congestion. And as they gathered together they just tarried long enough to discuss their problem. We like to think that that was a day when people were pressure-free, but don't you believe it! They had their problems, just as grievous as ours....

...the burden of taxation was oppressive....

...their society was polarized....

...they had their sons who were rebellious....

...they had their daughters who became wayward.....

....there was never quite enough money to go around.....

.....one problem after another, which made up the congestion of their day.

Then, mark you, in God's plan for us, there loomed upon the horizon a Carpenter's Son, and as He wandered around from village to village He got caught up in the congestion of that day, and He said something. He made a declarative statement regarding Himself which is absolutely amazing. He said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." Can you imagine a human being saying that to other people and during them to believe Him? -- that as they were caught up in all the misery of life, if they would only go His way, they could find the picture changing considerably and immediately.

Well sometimes when I stand out there I discover that there is a person who 'ducks' out and decides to use the porch entrance or exit, and with a little effort finds himself where he wants to go, in a more reasonable way, rather than being caught up in the congestion. And I say to myself, why, I wonder, did he do that. Did he just have a surmise that maybe that sidewalk would take him sooner to where he wanted to get? -- was it just a hunch on his part?.....there is no direction, you see.

Well I'm willing to suggest that there are people, as George Santayana the philosopher has said, who with a 'soul's invincible surmise' responded to Jesus Christ -- took Him at His word -- tried Him, and put Him to the test....without any reluctance on their part whatsoever. Wouldn't it be wonderful if all of us could be caught up in the great religious experience just like that? -- just spontaneously reacting, very freely responding to Jesus Christ....no argument, no persuasion. We do have a way of responding to people by surmise. Some of the closest friends that I have to this very day were people that I trusted at the very beginning -- I just naturally gravitated toward them. I did not stop to reason, I did not stop to argue. Some of life's most wonderful friendships have been established that way. The soul's surmise, says Santayana.....and there are people who respond to Jesus Christ

like that.

But I also know that there are some people who hesitate. They're not about to make the leap of faith -- they tarry -- they stand. They begin to reason, they begin to argue with themselves. And all of this is simply to say they will not make the effort to move in God's direction. I know very well that I'm schooled enough in basic Lutheran theology to know that God is always making gracious intimations in our direction, that the Holy Spirit is let loose in the world, that the Holy Spirit is all around us, encouraging us, wooing us, drawing us toward God. I know this is true.

But I also know that even though God operates in that way, we are never completely won over to God's side until we ourselves take the first step in His direction. Even God Himself will not reach down and pick us up, and physically move us by His side. There comes a time when God, no matter how much He may call to us, simply waits until we make the effort to move in His direction.

Has it ever occurred to you how many good things are going by the board in the whole world of our religious experience, just because we don't take the time, make the effort to respond. I never cease to marvel at the unbounded good and tremendous reservoir of the wonderful things that are happening in and through Saint Luke Church. Then it occurs to me that here and there they happen just because there are people who help to make them happen. They become the cooperative agents of the Holy Spirit....

...for those of you whose worship pattern is such that you are here at this hour and not at 8:30, it's a gratifying thing to see these choir stalls filled with junior-high-age youngsters at 8:30 -- those 40 youngsters, if that should be their number, just don't

get here. Somebody has to make the effort. Oh, I know psychologically we call Sunday a day of rest. Maybe we permit ourselves to think that we don't have to do much at all on this day. Yet tye'd never get here if somebody didn't make the effort....

....Mrs. McPherson knows a great measure of delight in the staff that she has involved in Christian Education in this parish. And if you were to visit our Sunday School on any given Sunday morning, you would be pleased with what you would find, I dare say. But it just doesn't happen! There are people in this parish who are willing to make the effort in order that others are taught....

....so it is true in the ministry of praise....

....so the seemingly endless number of things that happen through youth ministry....

...because there are those who take the time to make the effort. Even God says, I can do only so much for you until you move next.

I covet for myself the example of a preacher in New York City who, as Alex Dow told me not so long ago, his soul was transparent by the Holy Spirit. That preacher, mark you, every single day of his preaching career, spent a solid hour in prayer and meditation from 6:00 o'clock in the morning until 7:00 -- without fail.....in order to do that somebody has to make the effort to constantly discipline himself that this should happen. The Scriptures say "Be still and know that I am God"but it takes time in order to quiet the soul. A man has to make the effort, even to expose himself to the goodness of God!

A few years back when I was in the hospital undergoing some tests, I had time on my hands between the medical appointments. And during that stay in the hospital I read the autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi, the man who transformed the face of India -- who gave hope to the impoverished people throughout the face of the earth. What was his pattern? -- one entire day out of seven, with a day given to contemplation and spiritual renewal. It just didn't happen. Somebody had to make the effort.

John and Mae Troxler, bless their souls, a couple of Sundays ago went down to Gibsonville, North Carolina. They were celebrating the 45th anniversary of their graduation from high school. What a grand and good time they had as they reminisced, of course you can imagine! There were only fourteen in their graduating class, and all fourteen were there. They talked about their

teachers....they talked about their problems.....and then they talked about their class motto....

...do you remember those days of graduating classes when we chose our class motto and read our class will? how sophisticated some classes were with their class mottos.

There was one I knew that chose the Latin: "Don vivamus vivamus" -- "While we live let us live"

...then there was that graduating class in the hinterland of Pennsylvania that said as they graduated from high school back in 1933: "We have crossed the bay: the ocean lies before us."

....but the grand and good folk in Gibsonville, North Carolina, were quite close to the earth -- not nearly as poetic as other towns -- quite prosaic. Their class motto was this: "Push or pull or get out of the way"

So they came to grips with life and realized that nothing worthwhile ever happens unless there are those who will push, unless there are those who will pull...unless there are those who are willing to make the effort. And the implication is even greater than that: if you're not about to make the effort, then don't stand in the way of other people who will! And every now and then my heart cries out against people who wittingly or unwittingly stand in the way of folks who are trying to make the effort to be good.

There are folks who very earnestly try to seek out the Lord's way, only to be hampered and to be ham-strung by friends and neighbors, even kinfolk, members of their own family. For God's sake, when you do find somebody who is trying to make the effort to be better than he is, don't hamper him, don't get in his way.

Says Jesus Christ, I am the Way, the Truth and the Life - - - every now and then there are those who take His at His word, and respond, and make the effort. And all the while God is sending out these gracious intimations, encouraging us to respond....giving us a clue and a hint. And sometimes they're quite simple. Up in New York City not so long ago, in the days of the three-penny post card, by the way, there was quite a robbery. A half-million dollars of goods had been stolen. The police were baffled. Then one day there came to the office of the police captain a three-penny post card. Somebody had scribbled on the card the name of the place where the stolen goods could be found, and likewise gave some hint as to the culprit who were involved. It was only a three-penny card. It could have appeared as a very insignificant clue. But the police authorities were encouraged to go to the trouble to act, to make the effort, even on a clue as insignificant as that.

God is calling out to us each day, sending us signals, wooing us, encouraging us to follow His way. I submit to you that I don't know of a single problem that you may have to face that could not be met victoriously by the mind and the

spirit of Jesus Christ. That's a tremendous thing to say. Jesus Christ said, "Try it my way! - - come in my direction! - -

I am the Way and the Truth and the Life - - "

....I dare you to believe Him!

...if not by the son's invincible surmise, then by putting Him to the test. Make the effort. It pays off better than anything I know!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Cateche. The Fourth Sunday After Easter

April 30, 1972

"THROUGH THE EYES OF GOD"

O GOD, we don't have to tell You what
You already know -- we make so little
time for the sort of thing we're about
to do now, to find our way to Your
place and to give increased attention
to Your Word. Now as it is about to
happen, by the help of Your Holy Spirit,
let us make the most of it. Amen.

I can't tell you now whether we had the class just one day a week or once a month. And I can't recall well enough whether it happened when we were in the 4th grade, the 5th grade, the 6th grade. But I do know that the school system in that little Pennsylvania town must have made up its mind that those of us who were youngsters in the elementary grades should be exposed to some kind of culture.

Bafio was still in its infancy. The Chittauga Circuit came so very infrequently. So there loomed on the horizon a special teacher who came and conducted a course in music appreciation.

I can see her now....she went to this end of the room where the victrola was (earlier days referred to as a gramophone)...she played the record on the disk, and then with something of flourish and an air of authority she cranked the victrola, and then we listened. We listened as the record was being played.

....it was after she had finished playing the record that it occurred to me that in all likelihood I was about the dumbest one in the class, because then she gave us the quiz....

...did you hear this?did you hear that?

....there were others in the class

-- who I think honestly answered that they heard the babbling of the brook....they heard the soft gentle breezes whispering through the pines in the autumn haze of the twilight.....I didn't.

Fortunately, she played the record a second time. And when she played the record for the second time she stood by the victrola, and then she'd say, "Listen to it now -- it's coming up!"....only then it would occur to me that maybe I did hear the soft gentle breezes whispering through the pines in the autumn haze of the twilight!.....

I suppose that's the way it has to be -- that there are always those of us who are obtuse, dubwitted, who can come to an appreciation for something only as somebody else enables us to see it, through the eyes and the ears of the artist.

I get a measure of comfort, of course I do, when I visit an art museum and find there somebody moving from object to object, exhibit to exhibit, with one eye on the object on display and the other eye on the descriptive paragraph in his hand -- so that he might not miss everything that's there, he draws benefit through the eyes of the interpreter.

We have two sons, you know, one of whom is an artist. And among all the things that we argue about, this one usually pops on the scene: he tells me that an object of art ought to be able to speak for itself, that you ought not to have somebody standing around interpreting it for you -- that the artist ought to be gifted and skilled enough, once he's done his work, to walk away from it, and if the thing doesn't speak for itself, then the artist has failed....or otherwise the blame rests solely upon me! -- insensitive to what he has done.

...he thinks he has a point. I'm not so sure that he has. For not all of us, you see, are gifted and skilled with the endowments of the artist. Some of us need to be shown. Some of us have to be told in advance what we ought to look for, lest we miss it when it happens.

To this very day I give due and proper heed to the preface of a book, and I remember carefully the preliminary statement in the drama, so that I might acquaint myself with the mind and the spirit of the dramatist -- to better prepare myself for what's going to happen as I read what he said, what he portrays.

Now all of this I say to you because I want you to understand now, for the moment at least, that God is the Great Artist -- God is the creative genius. What has come from the mind and the hand of God is a work of art. And what is endeavored to accomplish you and I may be too dumb to understand. We need to have it interpreted for us, we need to draw the benefit from the artist himself, so that we might see through His eyes and better understand.

This is why I've given more than ordinary attention to the Gospel lesson for this day. Long before you heard it read this morning, I read it in anticipation of this day. You may not recall it, Mr. Clements, when he read the Gospel for the day, was telling us that Jesus Christ was advising His disciples that after He had passed from the scene, God would still be mindful of their need, and God would send them the Holy Spirit. And in this marvelous 16th chapter of the Gospel according to John, Jesus is telling what the Holy Spirit is going to do -- He's going to be our guide -- He's going to show us truth -- He's going to illuminate our minds. Bless Martin Luther's soul, when he came to explain the Third Article of the Creed, he said, "That's one of the works of the Holy Spirit -- to enlighten us, and to

guide us."

....make no mistake about it, you and I are absolutely unable to fully understand the mind of God unaided. God is God....man is man.

...man is finite.....God is infinite.

...man is human.....God is divine.

You and I have the limitations of this world of which we are part. God is eternal. God is creative. So if we are to understand what is in the mind of God, we are constantly in need of having it interpreted for us.

In the Lexington School for the Deaf in New York City, the teacher, is able to accomplish only what she can accomplish as she stoops to the level of the child. I can picture her, either on a tiny chair with a child in front of her, or on her knees with the child in front of her...stooping to the level of the child.....and as she uses her own hands, and the hands of a child to touch her lips, to touch the throat muscles -- so she identifies with the child, so she is able to interpret for the child, so the child has a whole new world opened up for him. But only as the teacher stoops to the level of the child.

So God stoops to our level....so God comes to us where we are. God, if you please, came down from Heaven to us in the form of a human being who opened our eyes that we might see the wonderful things of God. And that's what happened for three years in that ministry of the wandering Preacher.

...you know how it was, of course you do, when He walked away, and there were those who clustered together and said, "God became real to us! -- and I saw myself as I really am!"....through the eyes of God stooping to their level.

All right now, those three years are over. The Gospel lesson was read for us this morning and it comes as one of the final chapters in the rela-

tionship of Jesus Christ with His disciples. No longer would they be able to come to Him and say, "Jesus, tell it to us again!".....

....no longer would they be able to interrupt Him
when He was speaking and say, "Please make that
plain -- go over it again!"

...you know, they did that on more than one occasion. The Parable of the Sower is a good example, when He had said what He said, He had to back up, and go over it, presumably paragraph by paragraph. Otherwise they would not have understood. In fact, there was a great moment, among others, in the relationship of the disciples with Jesus Christ when He who came to interpret the mind and the spirit of God is in front of them, and one of the disciples is bold enough to say -- I can almost hear him saying it --

"For heaven's sake, make God plain to us and we'll
be satisfied."

And then Jesus brings them up short by saying: "Alright, you put it to me
in that way -- let me tell you something! Take a good look at me!
Whoever sees me, sees God!"

Now these days are about over. God remains constantly mindful of our need. So He has Jesus Christ telling His disciples "All right, you're going to return to Heaven -- their need is going to remain. Tell them this: that after you disappear from the scene, they will be visited by the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit will be God at work in their hearts and in their minds, who is going to illuminate their minds, who is going to enlighten them, who is going to show them these things, who is going to guide them in the way of truth." God wants them to understand. God will not leave Himself without witnesses. And they were never to think of God as the God who was! A God who was, you see, isn't of much value to us now. So Jesus Christ, standing

there in human form, says, "After I'm gone, the Holy Spirit takes over, and all that God's ever been doing continues! Now that you might not miss it - - "

(I can hear Jesus Christ saying, if you please)

" - - I want you to know exactly what the Holy Spirit is going to do: He's going to convict you of sin - - He's going to convict you of righteousness, and of judgment. Because these are things that God has to do for you because you'll never find them out for yourself."

Men do not call themselves sinners except as they are confronted by a Saviour! And not until a man knows that he's in need of salvation does he have any hope! And God has to get inside of us so that we might even understand that. Most of us, at the most, speaking very candidly, have a very high opinion of ourselves, and we're not about to call ourselves sinners.

...but that's one of the works of the Holy Spirit -- to give us a good glimpse of ourselves, through the eyes of God.

Why do you go to a physician? -- that he might be able to probe, interpret the X-ray, define your ailment. Because only after the diagnosis can he really begin to do anything helpful. The work of the Holy Spirit is to convince us of the righteousness of God. I remember so well how Dr. Anderson on Good Friday masterfully interpreted that Word from the Cross, as Jesus says, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit -- ".....as much as to say, "Okay, God, take over! -- I trust you completely!" Even God has to spend, if one may put it this way, an inordinate amount of time and energy trying to convince us that God is to be trusted. Insensitive as we are to all that God is, God is willing to take the time to convince us that He is a wise God and a good God and a great God, and a gracious God....and that we can trust Him.

God through the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to the fact that there is always to be a time of judgment. It most certainly comes. And part of the

work of the Holy Spirit is to get us ready for that time of judgment, to help us, if you please, to pass the final examination which none of us will ever be able to pass without the help of God.

So I stand at this sacred desk this morning to encourage you to take God at His word, to trust Him, to give Him a chance....

....to see yourself and the world through the eyes of God. Who is better qualified to interpret ~~than~~ than the divine artist Himself?

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Rogate. The Fifth Sunday After Easter

May 7, 1972

"MODERN MAN'S DILEMMA"

Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son
our Lord. Amen.

Let me talk to you at once about another preacher. He lived quite a while ago, in fact centuries before the time of Jesus Christ. He was really quite a chap. I suppose you could brand him more or less a reluctant preacher and maybe that's one reason why he was never a very popular preacher...because I suppose a man has to be very much in love with his calling if he's going to be at all effective as a preacher of the truth.

It wasn't that he didn't preach the truth -- it was simply that he wasn't so sure that he could do a very good job at it. And he wasn't quite certain that God had done the right thing in tapping him as a preacher. He did hang on, though, for four decades. For forty years he went around from place to place telling what he thought God wanted them to hear.

And that's one reason why Jeremiah wasn't a popular preacher. Most people don't want to hear what God thinks of them. They're much more secure with their own opinion of themselves. But Jeremiah went around from place to place, and as a preacher he had his hang-ups, and anybody who heard him preach for a while discovered that he had twin themes. One was this:

"You people out there -- you're falling away
from God. Once He was real to you...once you
lived by His truth. But now He doesn't seem
to cut much ice with you - - "

...well, that's one thing that he had to say whenever he had a chance.

I am wondering, if Jeremiah were living today, if he'd be able to draw on his barrel of sermons and make any change at all. For it could be that when a preacher of Jeremiah's stripe goes around from place to place today, he might come to the same conclusion:

"You people out there -- you're falling
away from God! He's not as real to you
as He once was. You've forgotten something . . ."

Every now and then, in company with most of you, I sit down and analyze contemporary men. And I come to the conclusion that modern man has quite a dilemma on his hands....but more about that later. How does one characterize modern man?

Well I think I'd have to say to you, in the spirit of Jeremiah, he doesn't much think of God. A very learned man, in a position to say authoritatively what he said, has maintained that something has happened in our time that has never happened before -- people no longer take God seriously enough to argue about Him. There was a time, maybe in the days of our grandparents, when people could get quite excited about arguing about God -- Is there a God or isn't there a God? -- and if there is a God, what's He like?

-- and why does He do certain things?

-- why won't He do other things?

....they argue about this, you see, and always surrounding the fact of God. Says my perceptive friend -- people aren't about to do this much any more, because they seldom if ever take into consideration the fact of God at all.

I don't read as many books as I once did, for a number of different reasons. Maybe I've lost my appetite, maybe I don't have time...maybe I rely heavily upon the reviewer and the critic. And if that should be the reason, then I know very well why I'm not reading as much as I once did, because I'm

not enjoying it as much as I once did! For if the critic and the reviewer is right, much that appears in contemporary novels and on the contemporary stage is a picture of modern man who has bowed God out of the universe. God just doesn't figure any more. Man orders his days without any spiritual or moral reference whatsoever.

This was the kind of thing that bothered Jeremiah a great deal. He couldn't quite figure it out. He couldn't name the reasons. He only knew it was a fact.

The second thing that bothered Jeremiah was this: knowing something about the nature and character of man, he honestly believed that when a man bows God out of the universe, then he's going to look for something to put in His place. For it's the nature of man to adore and to worship and to enshrine something or someone. And Jeremiah was also convinced that anything that man put in God's place would be a substitute. And a substitute would be far from being satisfying -- it would always lack something. It would be less than the real and the genuine. I've reached the place in my thinking where I think the fellow has a point who says that bad religion -- a religion that deals in idols, you see -- bad religion, says he, is worse than no religion at all. Because when a man puts his trust in something, and the thing in which he puts his trust fails to measure up when the chips are down, when the aching emptiness of the human heart remains -- what then?

I'm having a very gratifying experience these days, reading very slowly and deliberately some comments written by members of this year's Confirmation Class. Their assignment last week was a very simple one: Write at the bottom of the page a paragraph, several sentences in your own words, as to What Jesus Christ Means To You. For the most part they are thirteen - four-

teen years of age. Their language, thank God, is not in any way theological. It's simple, and it's plain. It seems as though every other one that I read goes like this:

-- I believe that Jesus Christ loves me

-- I believe that Jesus Christ is my friend

-- I believe that Jesus Christ will always stay by me

...this is encouraging! -- that in the impressionable years of their lives they should be so convinced.

But my reading of these paragraphs is also tempered by the fact that I have been confirming young people in the Christian faith for well-nigh beyond three decades, and I know that what a thirteen - fourteen year old thinks and feels is one thing - - - I know what he may not think or feel at twenty-eight or thirty is something else. Not that I'm ungrateful that in this significant period of their lives they should be rooted and grounded, as I believe they are. But I'm also realistic enough to know that there comes a time and a season when they may temporarily shelve God, when God may no longer figure as a vital thing in their lives. As significant as anything that was contributed to a retreat session at Bethany not so long ago was a precious young woman, confirmed in the Christian faith here at Saint Luke -- who spoke perhaps as one typical of her generation: "There comes a time," said she, "when it seems as though we can very easily put God in a closet and close the door, and walk away." God doesn't bother them, and they don't bother God.

If the years have taught me anything, I cherish the possibility that the years have taught me that a pastor can well afford to be patient, because I honestly believe that life has its way of driving people to their knees - - God has His own way through life by which He is vindicated. I have no trouble on this score at all. So I'm perfectly willing to wait, if

wait I must! -- while a generation temporarily shelves God.

This is why I'm perfectly willing to confirm young people in the Christian faith, in their impressionable years, because I know there is always a foundation being laid to which they can return, if stray they will. But in the meantime, what now? If the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, if the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not being enshrined and worshipped, then something else is. Long before Luther said it, Jeremiah wrote it: If a man will not have God, then he will have an idol. And this is the lamentable thing -- in the meantime, in the interim, something or someone other than God is being enshrined and worshipped, because man always has something or someone to whom he will give his allegiance.

This is where that preacher Jeremiah got up-tight. For once he said -- you can read it in the 10th chapter of his prophecy -- the gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, they shall perish from the earth. In these words Jeremiah is crying his heart out because people do not understand that the false gods in whom they put their trust will eventually perish. When the chips are down, they cannot produce. There is no endless reservoir upon which a man can draw. And this, I suggest, is modern man's dilemma -- he has shelved God. He's put Him aside.

But life does not have a way of forgetting about crises, the unexpected, and the demanding moments of life have a way of occurring and re-occurring. When they do, when a man with his back against the wall cries out for help, the substitute -- less than the real -- can never produce.

Turn the pages of history and you come to that great moment when God called a man by the name of Moses, as much as to say, "Come on, Moses, I have something I want to whisper in your ear -- there's something I want to make

plain to you that evidently up to this moment I've never been able to make plain to anybody else.....get yourself up into the mountain, Moses, and you and I will talk.".....

...but whenever God says something to a man alone, it's always that it might be channelled through that man to somebody else. God doesn't deal in secrets.....

So God told Moses, "Now get yourself down from the mountain. You tell these people something that no other people have ever been told. Tell them something that up to this point I've never told anybody else....."

...and God might also have added: "And once I've said it, you may rest assured that I will not change my mind - - ~~that~~

---then tell them, Moses --- begin by saying 'I am the

Lord thy God -- don't ever have any gods ahead of me'" !

Now why do you suppose God said that? If you haven't found it out for yourself up to this point, let me tell you. God didn't say it so much for God's sake as He said it for ours. Now think about that for a little while!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WHAT MAKES A HOME CHRISTIAN?"

Grace, mercy and peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

For many people most sermons are pretty much the same. This is not true, however, for the preacher who preaches the sermons. For him, undoubtedly, each sermon is a bit different than any other sermon that he's preached. This may be true for a number of reasons.

One, for whatever it might have been that triggered the original thought of the sermon. The preacher is laid hold upon -- a glimpse of spiritual truth comes to him. He feels constrained to speak about it.

...now when this happens, it may happen under different circumstances -- not always the same. Or perhaps there may be certain things occur while he is actually preparing the sermon, that is, as to the place where he may be when he is writing and reading and praying as he reflects in anticipation of the moment when he stands before the sacred desk. All these things enter into the preparation and the delivery of a sermon.

Or, perhaps you haven't thought much about this, but your reaction can make or break a preacher's sermon. It is your degree of expectancy, it is your degree of sensitivity which makes for a good sermon or a poor sermon. The burden is not always upon the preacher.

It's an interesting thing that I share with you now: congregations vary from place to place. They vary even within the parish. As an example, the preacher here at 8:30 may use an illustration that he continues to use

at 9:45 and 11:15, but the reaction given to that illustration at 8:30 may be somewhat different than the reaction that's given by the congregation that gathers at 9:45....and the reaction that you might give it at 11:15 might be quite unlike the reaction that's given at either of the other two hours. Oh, I've tried to figure it out -- how do you account for it? Are there certain subtleties, are there certain nuances, delicate as they may be, that enter into it?

This sermon this morning is most certainly unlike any other sermon, I think, that I've ever preached, because of the way it was prepared. It got its final touches yesterday when a group of 50 confirmands of Saint Luke Church got aboard a bus at 9:00 o'clock in the morning and we headed for Gettysburg. We have been doing this now for seventeen years. We say to a youngster who anticipates confirmation:

-- now that you're going to be a confirmed member of the church, you have a vested interest in two institutions of higher learning. The nearest ones to Saint Luke Church are Gettysburg College and the Theological Seminary in the same town. Every time you bring an offering you help provide a Christian witness there through a college or a theological seminary. Let's go up and see how they're spending our money....

...so we take them up there.

As we rolled along in the country-side yesterday, I did a kind of a hop-skip-and-a-jump thing. We were seated side by side, two on either side of the aisle. Then I'd ask a youngster here or I'd ask a youngster

there to excuse himself and let me sit in his place. And then I'd talk to the youngster alongside of me. And I began in somewhat of this manner: I said, "I need your help as I prepare my sermon for tomorrow. I'll tell you what the theme is: 'The Christian Home.' Now help me, will you. What do you think makes a home Christian? My question is, when is a home Christian, and what makes it that way?"

.....well, bless her soul, the first girl who answered, one of about five or six -- little did she realize that she was setting the pace to be followed by all the others, even though they did not know the precise answer that she gave. The first one to answer said, without any hesitation whatsoever, when I asked "What makes a home Christian?" -- she said "Parents" - - - as perceptive as that!

...then as we talked I put this question to her: Since parents are so responsible, what is it that you want most from your parents?.....and there again, without any hesitation, she said, "Love....and attention."

As I went from youngster to youngster they simply supplemented or amplified what the first girl said, even though they didn't know the answer that she had given. Interesting, isn't it. No mention made at all of gadgetry, no mention made at all of things. They wanted love. And attention.

Personally I was jolted a bit when about the third or fourth youngster said, talking about attention that parents should give youngsters, she was quite specific -- she said: "Attention when we need it." I say I was jolted a bit because, in company with most of you, I'd like to believe I'm nobly intentioned, too. That as a parent I would like to have seen the youngsters get attention that only parents can give. But I quite unashamedly

confess in your presence, and in the presence of the man who happens to serve as the Assistant Pastor of this congregation, would to God that I could have begun all over again tomorrow! For there are certain times when I know very well they should have had the attention from me and they didn't get it....there were times when I should have been with them in the bleachers or somewhere else, and I went off to a church meeting.

...and there are times that I can now say to you, at this vantage-point, when church meetings ought to be sacrificed, for what the youngster needs at a precise time and at a precise place other than inside the walls of a church.....

Thanks be to God, I had a wife who helped compensate for what I didn't provide.

There are certain things that a youngster needs when he's eight years of age that just can't be supplied when he's fifteen. If he doesn't get them when he's eight when he needs them when he's eight, no matter how earnestly we may desire, chances are we never quite make up for what the youngster needed when he was eight.

This sermon on this day which is being increasingly observed as the Festival of the Christian Home has a text, as every sermon ought to have a text. The text is a familiar verse, the closing verse of the second chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And Jesus went down to Nazareth and was subject unto them. And he increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man."

....a free translation is this: Jesus went home and obeyed His parents, and as He obeyed them He grew up, as a youngster ought to grow up, fully fashioned, completely orb'd, a four-square individual - - - He grew up physically, He

grew up socially, He grew up mentally, He grew up spiritually.....

I think it's a lamentable thing that when we think about Jesus Christ we allow a great gap to exist in the story of His life.....

...we make much of the fact of the Nativity -- we keep talking about the birth at Bethlehem, what happened then and there...

...we even added the chapter about the two-year period when He was in Egypt. Then we seem to stop. We put a block in it, a plug in it.

...and then we pick up the life of Jesus Christ during the three years of His ministry, when He was the preacher, the miracle-worker.....when He recruited the disciples, when He laid the groundwork for the Kingdom....

...we make much of the final act in His life -- the betrayal, the arrest, the crucifixion, the resurrection...

...we even talk about the Ascension....

...but we forget about that significant period in His life, when, if you please, He was growing up.

The older I get and the more I work with young people, the more I am inclined to picture for them Jesus Christ as a teenager. For He was, you know. I can picture Jesus as a starry-eyed youngster, getting away from the carpenter's shop as quickly as He could, climbing to the hill, yonder hill on the outskirts of Nazareth....lying flat on His stomach, with a blade of grass between His lips.....looking out yonder as the caravans went back and forth on the great highway. I can picture Him lying flat on His back, underneath the stars, as though He can almost reach and touch them.....and then coming back to His home. Mary, God bless her, recognizing at once

that this teenager had thoughts that she herself could not understand, but she pondered them as best she could and she kept them in her own heart. Surely there were times when His parents never understood Him.

I could not help but think as I rolled along on the bus yesterday to Gettysburg, these 8th - 9th graders, thirteen - fourteen years of age --- Jesus Christ was that age at one time. What is a youngster but a growing person? And anything that grows needs direction. Some very precious friends of ours have given us a Cedar of Lebanon tree for the grounds at 919 Highland Drive. I have been prodded for the last year-and-a-half by the Mistress of the Manse that that tree has to be properly staked or it's going to grow up crooked. And I'm happy to report to you, it's now properly staked. But she knows full well, of course, as anyone knows who works with growing things -- as the twig is bent, so is the tree going to incline. Hopefully we say, "Train up a child when he is young and when he is old he will not depart from it" - - - any growing thing, any growing person needs direction. "And Jesus went down to Nazareth and was subject unto them"....He grew up under the direction of Mary and Joseph. And that's the way God works.

You can't possibly do this unless you are directly involved, but for six Sunday afternoons now, at Gethany, the retreat house of Saint Luke Church, the Senior Pastor and the Parish Deaconess have been meeting with the parents of the confirmands and the confirmands themselves. There are sixty in the class. It takes a bit of doing, of course it does, but it's eminently worthwhile....

...we begin at 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon, we go through until about 9:00 at night. This is the way it begins....

I say to the youngster in front of me:

"There are four of us here, aren't there -- yourself, your Pastor

and two other people. You're here because you are looking forward to confirmation. I can't possibly confirm you until I know from you directly that this is what you want. I have to be sure that you understand the meaning of the question that's being put to you. ...I have to be sure that you understand the meaning of the answer that we require. So that's why you're here....

...I'm here because I'm God's agent in the Confirmation Service. I'll be placing my hand in blessing upon your head and will confirm you in the Christian Faith....

Now these other two people -- why are they here?
They are your parents -- and let me put it for you in this way, you may not have thought about it before.....here are the two people, more so than any other two people on the face of the earth, who have been most directly responsible for what you've come to know about God! ...and the direction that's been given your life, in God's name, through them. . . . "

That's the way God works! Children just don't grow up. They grow up under direction. Look again at it in this way -- when God saw fit to give us Jesus Christ, did He look around for some palace, for some castle? He didn't look around for a place, with whatever accouterments might be added to it. He looked for two people, He looked for a man and He looked for a woman whom He could trust, whom He respected, two people who trusted and respected each other....two people who brought integrity to their union and devotion to one another. So God began by saying, "Mary, I need you; and Joseph, I need you. I'm going to give you Jesus Christ. I'm going to put Him in your hands. Watch over Him! Direct Him! Bring Him up for Me. I have no other plan . . . " And would you believe me when I tell you that God

has no other plan for any other child - - - any other child that comes into the world, by God's plan, comes with God saying to two people, "I put him now and trust him to your direction."

I know it's a temptation for many a preacher to come to a sacred desk on this Sunday, the second Sunday in May, and rake parents over the coals for the job they haven't done. But I'm grateful for a pearl of wisdom given to me by the Parish Deaconess, who some months ago, when we were talking about a particularly youngster in a particular home simply said, "But, Pastor, remember -- most parents do the very best they know how." And last night, when I was tossing back and forth in bed, thinking about the sermon today, when I would meet you on the Lord's Day....I knew a great measure of joy when I knew that any number of names of the families that I could recall where youngsters were being put to bed last night and there was a father or a mother bending over them, saying a prayer....and any number of homes that I could name where a father or a mother went to bed last night asking God to give them wisdom to bring up their children in the best way that they could. It's happening. And I'm happy to tell you that never in the years of my ministry have I been associated with a confirmation class that is proving itself more spiritually sensitive than the group that's going to be confirmed next Lord's Day.

Would you believe me that even yesterday when we came back, right on schedule, when the parents came to get the youngsters to take them in their cars to go home...when I came back in here to the Nave, I found one spiritually sensitive youngster -- seated right where you are, Rudy Schuetzler, facing the altar, with deep and serious thoughts. And I said to myself, what a precious thing. It brings hope and encouragement to anyone who has the good fortune to work with youth. It just doesn't happen. They are youngsters who

have been prayed for....they are youngsters who are being directed.

Alvin Rogness, one of the great Christian thinkers of the Middle West, once wrote a book that deals with Luther's Catechism. When he comes to the Commandment that talks about honoring our parents, he has a very interesting suggestion: he suggests that we think in terms of God's vice-presidents....

...all right, God is the President of the universe,
and God can't be everywhere. And we have, if you please,
the executive or the corporate vice presidents represent-
ing Him.....that's what parents are -- God's representatives
at hand.....

As one who is blessed with the good fortune to work with your children,
let me thank you for what you do for them, in the name of Jesus Christ.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"PROMISES, PROMISES"

Grace, mercy and peace from God
our Father and from his Son, Jesus
Christ our Blessed Lord. Amen.....

"Promise her anything - but give her"

"Promise her anything - - but give her"

I don't know why I repeated it to you twice, for the simple reason that it infuriates me every time I think of it. Not that I'm against the product being advertized -- surely cologne and perfume have their place, but I think what troubles me most is simply this: the TV commercial is making light of promises --

"Promise her anything - - -"

...and the implication is, you don't have to keep the promise.

But promises were meant to be kept, and I give that to you on good authority, because God is the Great Promise-keeper, Promise-maker. If the Bible is anything, it is a book about promises --

-- promises made, and promises kept.....

-- promises made, and promises broken.....

The basic character of God remains constant. God just doesn't change His character. And when God is first introduced upon the pages of Scripture, He's making promises. And chapter after chapter as you turn from Book after Book, you find God in the role of a promise-maker.

He selects a whole nation of people, and He makes certain promises to

them, and He keeps those promises. . .

...every now and then He chooses a particular individual

-- a man by the name of Abraham...Isaac...Jacob....Moses...

...Jeremiah,Isaiah.....

-- time and time again as He puts His finger upon one

man, He will say to him in no uncertain way:

"I need you!"

...and like as not the person shies away from God, and gives God a number of different reasons to believe that maybe God had made a mistake in choosing him. But God doesn't make mistakes. So God keeps saying to the person, time and time again, "You're my man."

And again and ever so often the individual says, "But I can't do it!" And God says, "You can do it, because I'm going to make you promises: I will never ask you to do anything, no matter what it may be, unless you can be assured of my promise, the promise of my power and the promise of my presence."

....promises....promises.....promises.....

...you see, this is why I become infuriated when I even hear

now the echo of the commercial: "Promise her anything - - -"

...for promises were meant to be kept!

There's a great moment in the lives of our friends when we honor with our presence today, when they approach the altar, and publicly, as they have never done before, let all of us who are here, in behalf of the whole side world, know that they are making promises:

"Do you love the Lord Jesus, and do you promise to serve Him through His Holy Church?"

"Yes, with my whole heart." - - - you're making a promise. And

promises were meant to be kept, because God Himself has given us the example. As God keeps His promises, so I admonish you this day to keep your promise to Him.

Now what are some of the promises that God makes?

When our Blessed Lord was here on earth, He was about to leave His disciples and they became troubled and bewildered -- they couldn't quite think of life without Him. And to reassure them, Jesus Christ as God made certain promises to them. As an example, He said:

"I will never leave you -- I will always be within reach -- " ...that's a promise that God makes to you through Jesus Christ. And God continues to keep that promise -- He's always readily available.

One of the significant things that occurred among your own group was when you were asked to express in your own words what Jesus Christ means to you....and as precious as any of the extracts that appears on Page Four of the current issue of the MESSENGER is what one of you has said -- that when you come to God you don't have to wait for Him to pay attention to you -- -- He pays attention to you at once. He is readily available ...He makes that promise.

Come wind or weather, I cannot predict what lies ahead for you in your discipleship as a Christian. I only know that there is a very significant moment in the ritual of one of the Christian churches, that either when a person is baptized or confirmed, the officiating minister gives him a slap on the face -- oh, not as vigorously as I indicated, yet a slap! -- to represent the fact that as he faces the world he will have blow after blow given to him, and particularly because he happens to be a Christian. So come wind or weather, whatever may lie ahead for you, remember someone has made a promise, even God Almighty: "I'll be there within reach -- I

will never leave you.....I will never forsake you."

The Promise-maker also says:

"I will give you my peace. My peace I will leave with you -- the kind of peace that the world cannot give and the kind of peace that the world can never take away."

As I remember my association with you in Catechetical Class, I have had enough of a relationship with some of you to be able to visualize what you're going to be 30 - 40 - 50 - 60 years from now. And I can readily visualize some of you, according to some of the saints that I've met in life -- you're going to have the same blessed qualities that they've had -- a blessed quality that means that your life is characterized by an inner peace, so that in an untroubled way you can be able to persevere with patience the course that God expects you to run, and you'll be able to do it because you'll remember that God is saying to you, "Come wind or weather, I give you my peace."

God makes this promise:

"Whoever comes to me I will in no wise cast out;
Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as
white as snow."

I know you very well, because every single one of you is somewhat of a reflection of the nature of all the rest of us. Some of you will sin, and you will sin sadly, and some of you will be terribly, terribly sorry because of what you've done that's not right in God's sight. But I can tell you one thing: that He who made the promise will not break it. He continues to say to you? "Come unto me -- I will never turn away."

There is a woman who went out of church this morning and very gratefully said, "It was sixty-some years ago today that I was confirmed." I'm glad that she looks backward to that precious moment. But I'm also inclined to think, knowing her as I do and at her age, that she's reached the stage in life where she's looking to what could happen tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, or the next year or within the next decade -- her earthly pilgrimage could come to an end. And then what? God makes us ready for that. He has a promise to hold us in good stead even when the moment comes when we breathe our last. And the promise that God makes through Jesus Christ is this:

"In my Father's house I will always have a place for you"
...as children of God you will never be left out!

It's a reassuring thing to know that God makes a promise, and keeps it. Promises.....promises.... God makes them. You make them. God, who makes promises through His Holy Spirit, helps us to keep the promises that we make. You'll never be able to keep the promises that you make today in your own strength. So that's why on this day we recognize the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ comes inside us, and the Holy Spirit, which is the spirit of Christ in the world today, helps us to keep the promises that we make.

A famous mystery story is built upon the idea of sympathetic vibrations. A detective had reason to believe that a stolen violin might be hidden very close to the scene of the crime. Upon the assumption that the thief had not loosened the strings of the priceless stolen instrument, the detective walked through the building, vigorously bowing the strings of another violin....and then stopping the vibration. While he listened

he was rewarded when he heard the quiet tones of sympathetic vibration from the other violin. You and I, promised the gift of the Holy Spirit, whenever we are quiet enough and made still before God, we hear God making certain promises to us. And now the text for this brief meditation:

"Repent and be baptized and receive
the gift of the Holy Spirit"

...that's what you're doing today, in one way or another, in the service of Confirmation. And then says Jesus Christ,

"The promise is unto you, and unto
your children."

Promises.....promises.....promises.... God makes them. God keeps them.

So then, whenever a person makes a promise -- really now -- it's the moment of truth. That's what it is. And what a person really is is indicated not only by the promises he makes but by the promises he keeps.....

" . . the moment of truth is here for you.
This moment will never come again "

...and even as I read these words, you are about to be surrounded by people who within the past few years have made these promises, who once sat exactly where you now sit, who once came and approached the altar and used the very same words that you are about to use.

"The moment of truth is here for you.
This moment will never come again.
I know the One who can make life begin,
You, too, can know Him, my friend.

We'll help you get it all together
If your life is falling all apart.
Here's the chance of a lifetime for you,
We'll give your life a new start . . .

(young people singing "Moment of Truth" from "NATURAL HIGH" by
Carmichael and Kaefer)

"If your life is a puzzle to you/ The pieces won't fall into place./ I know
the One who can fit them together,/ Come now and meet him face to face. -- "
(this sermon transcribed as recorded)

"NO STRINGS ATTACHED"

Grace, mercy and peace from God
the Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Some of us do remember when he lived, and that's why we can especially appreciate that for other people he's become a legendary character. The reference is to Henry Ford, the man who pioneered the automobile industry. He really was quite a character. He was the man, you see, who said, "The American people can have any color car they want, as long as it's black." He's the man, you see, who also pioneered and guaranteed every man who worked for him \$5.00 a day, a monumental step to be taken at that time, because one does know that in this period of history \$5.00 would buy all the groceries for a family of four or five in a week's time.

Henry Ford was also the type of fellow who, it's been said, had no real office of his own. He carried certain data around in his vest pocket, and then he'd go to some other man's office and there transact business, for, said Henry Ford, "It's easier for me to get out of that man's office than to get that man out of my office."

Henry Ford, the legendary character, for so it would seem to people who know him only as they read the history books, was the man who at his own expense chartered a ship with a special delegation and sent them to Europe, hoping to ward off World War II.

But I bring Henry Ford to your attention this morning for the sim-

ple reason that he's the man who's supposed to have said, "You never give anything away with no strings attached." Many a fellow pushing his way up the business ladder has taken a leaf from Henry Ford's book. For they said, you succeed in business only as you have strings attached! -- you wait for the opportunity to do some man a favor, knowing that you might be able to exploit that situation and keep that man in a situation where some day he may have to return the favor to you. A shrewd business man says, you don't do anything unless you can expect a return -- you never give anything away with no strings attached.

Significantly enough, very shortly we will be approaching the altar of the Lord, to receive Jesus Christ through the blessed Sacrament. As we approach the altar we will remind ourselves that in the night in which our Lord was betrayed, He took bread and He broke it, and He gave it to His disciples and He said, "Take - eat" -- no strings attached --

"...and after the same manner when He had supped, He took the cup and when He blessed it He said, Now take it and drink . . . " -- no strings attached --

For God-come-to-us-in-human-form, Jesus Christ, is love incarnate, and perfect love and complete love does not attach strings to what it gives and to what it offers.

If He had been only human, we can readily understand how He might have reasoned within Himself and said, "Look what's happened to me already -- they are hostile -- there is one enemy camp after another waiting to kill me.....just around the corner at the top of a hill there's a cross -- why should I give, unless I can expect a measure of return? Do I not have a right to exploit a situation from this point on?"

...but love doesn't reason that way! And that's one

reason why you and I are willing to go on living day after day, because we have met some people who have just loved us, purely and completely, unreservedly, who have done us good and have never expected a thing in return.

Picture it -- please picture it....especially as you come to the altar and if you're in a position where you can look at the carved figures in the front of the altar, representing a betrayer, representing a denier - - - and Jesus Christ says to Peter, "Go ahead, Peter -- it's for you just as much as it is for John and Andrew and Bartholomew -- no strings attached, Peter . . . "

(would you believe it) " . . . Go ahead, Judas, you're at the table, too - - - take, eat - drink -- this is my body
-- this is my blood - - - I'm sacrificing myself . . . "
...for a denier?
...for a betrayer?

This is the nature of God's love.....no strings attached.

Back up for a moment, if you please. Suppose you are rooted and grounded in the philosophy that to get ahead you've got to attach strings. To get ahead, you've got to expect a return on your investment. Would you really want to live in a world like that, where that is the guiding foundational principle? Can you picture a father and a mother caring for an infant child who determines everything that's done in the waking moments and in the sleeping moments that are interrupted, only on the basis of doing good so that in the years to come the child might be exploited?

. . . can you picture a member of the staff of Saint Luke Church, involved in ministering to people in the name

of Jesus Christ, who withhold a gracious deed because they might have reason to believe that there is no return to be forthcoming? Who'd want to live in a world like that? -- where the world operates primarily on cool calculation as to whether or not the risk ought to be taken. And surely the risk would never be taken if there couldn't be some guarantee or a good investment.....

... "You never give anything away without strings being attached" -- is not the language of God.

Our Lord Jesus Christ in the night in which he was betrayed said, "Take it -- eat.....take it -- drink!no strings attached. God loves us -- that perfectly -- that completely.

It's been said that an Arab who lived on the desert all of his life, once saw water gushing down from an Alpine peak. He just stood there in utter amazement. He couldn't believe his eyes that he was looking at something that seemed to go on forever and ever and ever without an ending. That's the way some of us feel when we come to the altar to receive Communion: completely bowled over -- overwhelmed by the fact that here the love of God is flowing into our lives, unreservedly, and without restraint. If this thought isn't enough to put a spring in your step and joy in your heart, then you are of all people the most insensitive to the love of God, who gives, freely and sacrificially.

* * * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"NO OTHER GODS - - "

GRACE, Mercy and peace from
God our Father and from His
Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed
Lord. Amen.

Some of you may recall that at the time of the Annual Meeting there were two Commissions authorized. One Commission was to study specifically the needs, the facilities, the concerns, the programs of this congregation - - - what need have we for additional staff? Are there needs in the community that ought to be met through Saint Luke Church? Has the time come when we ought to consider an addition to our facility?

...these are the questions being asked by Commission One.

To assist them in their study they have circulated among the parish a questionnaire. Once the questionnaire has been filled in, they'll amass a significant amount of data upon which they ought to be able to make intelligent decisions and recommendations.

Last evening I filled in our questionnaire. As I looked over the questionnaire I thought to myself, well now, this one question maybe isn't as relevant as maybe the committee thinks it is. My reference specifically is to the question: What is your occupation? ----- for I can't quite see what difference it's going to make to the Commission whether I as a member of this congregation am a preacher or a plumber....as

far as making a decision is concerned as to what needs in the community ought to be met, and as to whether or not we ought to add another staff member, whether that staff member means an additional custodian or an additional typist - - - what difference does it make whether I as a member happen to be somebody who spends his time and energy as a preacher, a professor, a plumber or a psychiatrist?

But nonetheless I'm happy that that question is there. Because I do look upon myself as a person who is vitally interested in people, and I'm one of those who may be, such as you, who becomes a bit restive until he finds out what a person does. Picture yourself seated alongside of a person in a plane or a bus, or you've just been introduced to somebody in a room and you're left alone, and in the course of the conversation it could be eventually you get around to the question, don't you? -- directly or indirectly - - - what do you do?

The question honestly cannot be ignored. For what a man does becomes an expression of the way he spends his time and his energy. And honestly now, the only unique contribution that any person ever makes to society is the contribution that he makes through the way he spends his time or his energy. That is the only distinctive thing about you -- even your gifts, your skills and your expertise matter for little if you don't invest them through your time and your energy, and direct them through your day's work. So I am glad the question puts it there: What do you do -- or rather: Your occupation.

What little I know about this congregation, as far as the day's work is concerned, I do find interesting. And the spectrum is very wide. And

I presume the questionnaire, once they are returned, will continue to show us how wide the spectrum really is....

...as an example, there was a woman present at 8:30 this morning, a member of this church, and if she were to put down on the questionnaire her former occupation, she'd probably put down "pork-plunker"....because there was a time in her life when she stood there at the conveyor belt, and the cans of beans rolled along, and she was the last person at the assembly line.....she gave the masterful stroke -- by which that pork plunked into the can, transformed a can of beans into a can of pork-and-beans! Now that's how she invested her time and her energy.....

...we have also in this congregation a woman who, if she were to record her occupation, would say, "I am an expert in re-touching portraits!"

Well, when the questionnaires come in I am certain that there is one we're not going to find. In my book it's about the oddest of all occupations. I read about a man who has this occupation. He works for the New York Times. He is their chief Obituary Writer. For six years now he spends his time and his energy interviewing great people, in anticipation of their death . . . because his responsibility is to record on the printed page, for all posterity, the record of how these people invest their time and their energy while they lived.

I suppose none of the people that he interviewed has ever proved quite as interesting as the chap who died four years ago and was buried from Stutzman Funeral Home on Jamaica Avenue in Queens Village, New York. I can't give you his name. I only know the obituary writer was

able to get two full columns in the New York Times, and space for a photograph, to talk about this man who was simply referred to as the "King of the World." The article went on to say how he went from place to place and enthroned himself....

...he visited 71 different college campuses, and there in the present of the students he had an enthronement ceremony...

...he visited 100 different nations in the world, and in each capital city of the nation that he visited he had this enthronement ceremony.....

...he had his throne alright -- a six-dollar aluminum folding chair...he had a sceptre...he had a flag...

...he had a plastic globe, symbolic of the fact that this is the world over which he had domain....

...his crowning moment came when he went to the Red Square in Moscow, and enthroned himself the King of the World....

You find it rather amusing, don't you -- to think that this chap, even reaching 76 years of age, should be so illusioned, spending his time and his energy thinking of himself as King of the World.

And yet I submit to you this morning with all the strength of my soul, that what he did in fancy many of us do in fact. For there are any number of people that you may know who spend their time and their energy thinking only of themselves, and enthroning themselves as the only person who really matters in the world and beyond which there is no one else. Who could be beyond the King of the World?

And now the text for this brief sermon. It's recorded as the 20th chapter of the Book of Exodus, the condensation of three verses:

"I am the Lord thy God . . . thou shalt have
no other gods before me . . ."

It was a great moment in history. God had brought His chosen people out of Egypt. He was getting them on the way to the promised land. And somewhere along the way, at a particular place called Mount Sinai, He had them stopped. And then He had a rendezvous with their leader, a man by the name of Moses. And He gave Moses to understand certain things: they couldn't go one step farther until they got something perfectly clear - - God laid down the law. God said, "This is the way it's going to be -- these are My terms! - - you are My people! - - you're going to My land - - you're to serve My purpose.....I give you no options."

God does talk like that. And it's well that He should. Because we need to hear that kind of talk from the one who is qualified to give it to us. And God began by saying,

"I don't want anybody to get in My way - -

I don't want you to give Me any competition . . ."

One of the translations puts it this way: "I am a jealous God - - I can't stand for anybody else around. I don't want divided affection. I won't tolerate divided loyalty. You put Me first. You don't have any other gods in front of Me!"

When I was a Sunday School boy, my teacher came down pretty hard and pretty heavy with that lesson. Then she went on to say that we weren't to make any graven images....

...I don't know why she spent so much time harping about graven images because I wasn't about to take my pocket knife (I wasn't handy with it, anyway) - - and to go out and to get a chunk

of wood and start carving it and making a little idol, and then falling down three times a day in front of it.....

...I wish she would have spent her time trying to make plain to me that this didn't apply to me, this business about making graven images - - I wish she would have come down hard and heavy on this thought: that anything or anyone who receives our primary concern, on whom we spend our time or our energy, that thing or that person becomes our god.....and that thing or that person becomes the competition that we offer God, because it is the nature of man -- make no mistake about it -- it is our nature to enshrine somebody, or a thing.

Every single one of you, every single one of us, has something or someone that comes first in our lives, whether we recognize it or not. There's always something or someone that gets a priority, and anything that becomes #1 in our lives becomes our god! So eventually a man has to ask himself the question: What or who is my real god? When we gather together to worship, we may say God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is our God, but that may not necessarily follow that He's our real god. Because the real god is the one who gets our attention, who claims our time and our energy.

I don't know whether I'll jolt you a bit this morning or not when I tell you that for a good many people, they may make themselves their god. This chap, starry-eyed as he might have been, who called himself King of the World, made himself Number One -- there was nobody beyond him. So he enshrined himself and he made himself the object of his concern. It may surprise us if we were to sit down sometime and make a good survey of our own lives, to discover how much of our own time and energy is spent in advancing ourselves. From the time we get up in the morning until the

time we go to bed at night, for a significant number of people their time and their energy is spent chiefly in the interest of themselves -- at the exclusion of somebody else, or anybody else.

Did it ever occur to you that you might be setting yourself up as your own real god, to the end that you begin and think only of yourself? I once heard a definition for hell -- quite unlike any definition for hell that you might get from the Scriptures. But I don't know of anything that's in the Scriptures that would disqualify this definition. My friend who gave me this definition of hell said, "Hell is simply a person ending up with nobody on his hands but himself." Now what prompted him to say that? -- He had known some people whose only total concern in life was themselves. So in the end -- they got themselves.

As I indicated earlier to you during the announcement period, I don't know what the years will bring to you, I have no idea how your life will end up. I'd like to predict how it may end up - - - baptized, confirmed in the Christian faith, claimed by Jesus Christ -- you have before you the exemplar, the Master of Men, who so loved that He thought not of Himself. He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death on the cross, that He might live for others. I should like to think that no matter what your occupation may be, your days and your years will be spent, in God's name, in helping other people.

Now there's an alternative to that, and God is always giving us options. I am reasonably certain if it won't be that, then it's going to be something else. And that something else will be serving your own purpose, advancing your own selfish ambition. And God sometimes has a way of letting you get what you want most.....and if that should be the alternative that you should choose, then that would be hell...

...which is a sobering thought.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

June 11, 1972

"PERFECT PEOPLE"

DEAR GOD, We have so little time to do the sort of thing that we're going to do now -- to listen to someone talk about your word, to give attention to a text. Help us, then, to make the most of it, and that good should come to us, let the Holy Spirit use the preacher, and the hearer as well. Through Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord, who came preaching. Amen.

I am reasonably certain that if I were today a student in a theological seminary, and had been asked to write out in detail the sermon that I'm about to preach to you now, that the professor in homiletics would have taken his red pencil and would have written in such words as these:

" . . . announce this later - -

" . . . bring this thought in near the conclusion
of your sermon, certainly not at the beginning . . . "

...now such notation, my friend, would appear in connection with the title for this sermon, and likewise the text.

Knowing human nature as I do, I can readily understand why the professor in homiletics would give me that advice, and that's why I'm quite reluctant now to announce at the very beginning what I would like very much to do -- the title for this sermon, and likewise to tell you the very passage of Scripture which compels me to talk to you in the way that I'm going to talk. I'm warning you -- unless you allow yourself to be made sensitive to the Holy Spirit, the very mention of the sermon's title and the very reading of the sermon's text could turn you off.

Well at considerable risk, here goes.

Today's sermon bears the title, "Perfect People" -- and the text: of all things, recorded words of Jesus Christ, the 5th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, the 48th verse:

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your
Father in heaven is perfect . . ."

I know you, my friend. You're on the defensive immediately. You know something about yourself. You know that you're not perfect. You know that you've never been perfect....and you don't have much prospect of your ever becoming perfect.

And if this is what you know about yourself, honestly now -- you know it far better of other people that you could name, because that's why you and I, wittingly or unwittingly, are always talking about their failures -- we know they're not perfect. But the text remains, and I'm not about to change the title of the sermon: "Perfect People."

I am fully aware of the fact that some time ago I found myself in the very difficult situation of criticizing somebody and of taking that person to task, because of something that was being done wrong day after day and week after week. It's not easy for me to take people to task. I'm quite conscious of my own failings, more so than you may realize. But nonetheless, because you stood to benefit by my taking that person to task, I could not fail to discharge my obligation. So I pointed out her errors and gave her to understand that this parish was not benefiting by such continued mistakes. The response that I got was simply:

"Well, nobody's perfect!"

Quite true! But one had a right to expect a response quite different

than that. How can there be any hope for improvement if one's going to settle so easily for the fact that mistakes are to be expected? ...and we have no right to require an approximation of a standard of perfection.

I suppose it would be a very easy thing for me and for you if on occasion I came to this pulpit and announced a text and said, "Now you don't have to take this text very seriously." One might be inclined to give this kind of a text for today's sermon that kind of treatment. But I don't know that any man can go to the Scriptures with a pair of scissors in his hands and cut out certain verses with which he does not agree, that he's not able to understand. This text cannot be ignored, if for no other reason than this: it is recorded as the spoken word of Jesus Christ!

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as
your Father in heaven is perfect."

But nobody's perfect, no we say. Nonetheless Jesus Christ, who wandered around from place to place, laid down such a standard for Christians.

Now what does it mean to be perfect? Maybe we can find a loop-hole there. Maybe the word just doesn't quite mean what down deep in our hearts we know it means. J. B. Phillips, a very able translator, who in much of his translation provides us a kind of interpretation, continues to use the word perfect. He hasn't found a substitute for that word. Perfect.....what is it to be perfect?

...full and complete maturation

- - one who reaches for the fruit of the vine, or the plant, plucks the fruit when it is ripe, when it has reached the stage it is capable of reaching and was meant to reach, without blemish.....

Is this possible for a Christian -- to reach the state that God knows he is capable of reaching and expects? Is it?

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as Your
Father in heaven is perfect . . ."

John Wesley, who has always commanded my respect and regard, was the firebrand of Methodism. He was one of those people that God raised up in a dark period of the Christian Church....

...you know, it works that way, don't you? Things never become so bad but what Jesus Christ says, "Now is the time for them to become better"

...John Wesley loomed on the horizon at that time. He was baptized, he was confirmed, he was ordained -- a priest of the Anglican Church. With his zeal he even crossed the Atlantic and came to America to evangelize the Indians, with unproductive efforts....
...on his way back to England he was exposed to some Moravians who had an inner peace and calm amidst the storm of the Atlantic....

...but more significantly, at a quarter-to-nine on May 25, in the year 1735, when somebody was talking about Luther's interpretation of the Epistle to the Romans, John Wesley said, "I found my heart strangely warmed"...and something happened to him that became as a turning point in his life...he was never again the same....

John Wesley therefore made much of two things in the Christian experience. One was conversion

...he honestly believed that any man who
took the name of Christ ought to recognize
the fact that his life was being turned around,
just because he was a Christian....

Now whether this would happen dramatically or gradually, that may not be the important thing. The important thing is that a man who is a Christian knows that his life somewhere along the line has been turned around, and in the name of Jesus Christ he's facing in a different direction.

John Wesley made much of two things in the Christian experience. One was conversion.

The other: perfection.

...it was not enough for him that a man should
be turned around and faced in another direction
-- it was also required that a man should make
some progress in the direction in which he now
faced, that there ought to be ways and means by
which you could determine the improvement that's
taking place.

I suppose that it is because of my regard for John Wesley that again and ever so often I have told you, the people of this parish, that you ought to be better Christians now than you were a year ago, and if you can't say that, then there's something wrong with your Christian experience.

John Wesley, by the way, felt this so strongly that every now and then he went around to different congregations and conducted an examination, so that he might be able to put before them evidences of their continued

growth and development as Christians. In the year 1743 John Wesley went to Newcastle, and there he examined the congregation, the individual members. He was looking for evidences of growth, another way of saying, "I'm looking for this indication that will prove to me that you are approximating perfection." Would you believe me, by the time he was finished he deliberately purged 140 people from the church roll because there was no evidence that they were continuing to grow as Christians, caught up in this process of perfection....

...you might be interested in knowing what, as a matter of historic record, was a justification for telling people that they were not caught up in this perfection process:

...two were purged from the church roll because they were habitually swearing....

-- John Wesley believed that if a man became a Christian you ought to get rid of a habit like that...he should no longer have it...

...two were purged from the church roll because of Sabbath-breaking....

...seventeen, next to the largest single number in any category, were removed from the church roll because of drunkenness....he just couldn't quite see how a man could give evidence of Christian growth and development and order his activity on any day, and be drunk at the same time....

...two were purged from the church roll because they sold spiritous liquors....

...three were purged from the church roll because they engaged

in quarreling, and for John Wesley quarreling was not a way of life for Christians....

...one, would you believe it, was told that he could no longer be a member of the Christian Church because he was a wife-beater...

...three were removed from the roll because they were deliberate, willful liars -- you could never count on them to tell the truth, and John Wesley says, this does not become the Christian....

...one, mark you, was removed because he was downright lazy

...twenty-nine were removed because they were too light-hearted, too careless...for John Wesley, being a Christian was always a serious thing....

Bless his soul, he never had done with this, it was a kind of an obsession with him: that once a man knew he was a Christian he ought to be moving along the road toward constant improvement. Even seventeen years later, in 1760, he went to Cornwall and examined a congregation that had 1700 members, and he purged almost one-third of them -- I suppose for similar reasons.

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."

....give evidence of your continued growth and development as a Christian.

I never cease to marvel how easy the Christian church makes it for a person to become a Christian in name. I can hardly believe that the statistics of the Lutheran Church in America are simply determined by the fact that you can lay your finger upon a person who happens to come to church at least once a year, and makes any kind of financial contribution

of record! Is that all the Christian church requires --- nothing more than that?

With you undoubtedly I read what others have written about the growth and development of certain Christian groups, and we're being told, contrary to a popular notion, that the Christian groups that are growing while others are not are the groups that require rigid standards of their members --- constant evidence of activity and endeavor and spiritual maturation...."A man's reach should exceed his grasp or what's a heaven for?" -- it's only as we strive after that which is far better do we show any kind of improvement at all.

When some of us have gone to Copenhagen, one of the things we wanted very much to see was the "Church of Our Lady" in that marvelous city. In the Church of Our Lady, you see, that building is blessed with the mind and the spirit of the work of the hand of Torvaldsen, the great sculptor. It's in that church, you know, instead of stained glass windows you have niches in the wall where there are life-size statues of the Apostles, beautifully done. And then over the altar is the Christus, with His arms outstretched: "Come unto me."

....close by the Church of Our Lady is the Torvaldsen Museum, where there are other works of the great spirit. And if you were to visit there I am reasonably certain that the person in charge would tell you a little bit about Torvaldsen -- and one of the things he dreaded, one of the things that he didn't want to hear was for somebody to come and to tell him his work was well-nigh perfect -- as though he had arrived. For if he could believe this, then, you see, his spirit would be stifled. There was al-

ways something over and beyond toward which he had to strive if there was to be any spirit and integrity to his work that was to be far better than what had been done. So I suggest to you that contrary to your initial thought, this is not unrealistic, to say "become perfect." It is the most realistic of all recommendations, for no man can ever allow himself to think that in the sight of God he has it made, as though he could turn to his Heavenly Father and say, "I've progressed this far -- I'm quite satisfied with what I am, and I trust that you are too, God. And don't expect anything more from me."

If you should have a perfectionist in your family, if you should have a perfectionist where you work, you have your moments where you could tear your hair -- they're not easy with whom to live. But do you realize how great our debt is to the perfectionists, who are always asking us to do something better, to improve, to go beyond the plateau? What is the enemy of the best? -- the fact that too easily we settle for what is simply good. With all the strength of my soul I give you ample warning: my usefulness as your Senior Pastor will continue only as long as I can challenge you to become better than what you are, to say to you again and again: the golden day of Saint Luke Church is not in the past! -- that the precious moment that He now allows us is only the prelude to something better!

...by that same token I say that to your own life, in your personal practice of the Christian experience. God never allows any man the luxury of throwing himself into neutral:

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father in heaven is perfect -- "

...the oneness that we have with each other, like the oneness that God has with his Son. And what characterized that oneness? -- patience and love.

About the fourth seat from the front , here by the pulpit this morning, sat one of our members who for forty years was a farmer in Virginia. He's never taken the country out of his soul. And within a mile of Saint Luke Church, right from where you're sitting now, he has as fine a garden as any man would want to see. Now how does he get the yield of the good earth to perfection, to complete maturation?

...he never gives up weeding...

...he never gives up fertilizing...

...he never gives up cultivating...

...he never gives up watering when necessary....

...and I dare say he looks upon each plant with a measure of love. And as he prunes and pares very carefully, so the yield reaches maturity.

Maybe that's the lesson that you and I have to learn when we're dealing with other people. As God expects them to strive toward perfection we ought to help them along the way, with patience, and with a measure of love.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Third Sunday After Trinity

June 18, 1972

"THE CHRISTIAN TECHNIQUE"

GRACE, mercy and peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Those of us who hail from the hinterland know something of the dread forest fire. At the very mention of the word it seems as though we can hear the crackling sound of burning timber and see the eerie sight of a whole hillside ablaze like a flaming torch. We immediately recall something of the panic that sets in on the community, when the word goes out that the fire is not under control and that while it remains out of control there is a great need for people to come as volunteers to help combat the fire. So the men immediately get the word around....they leave their shops, they leave their homes, they go to the mountain.....

...eventually the word comes down: the fire is now under control. And the whole community is relieved, wrestling now with the sadder facts -- how many acres were destroyed? -- and what toll do you suppose was taken of the wildlife?

As a youngster I was always intrigued by one of the techniques they used to bring a forest fire under control. Maybe some of you are familiar with it: one anticipates the safe distance at which to go as the fire approaches, and then a very wide swath is cut and fire is deliberately set to this particular section, so that by the time the forest fire reaches this point, this part will have been burnt over, and hopefully the wind

will not carry the sparks beyond this swath. In this way, you see, you stop the fire -- you stop the fire with fire. Hence the expression: you fight fire with fire.

Because the technique has been so successfully employed in the physical world, there are those who maintain that it ought to be used in the moral world as well, that the only way to outwit evil is to fight evil with evil. And for any number of centuries the world has believed that pretty much. Whether we care to accept it or not, the world operates on a "tit-for-tat" philosophy. Most people succumb, subscribe to the principle: "If that's the way you're going to treat me, then that's the way I'm going to treat you." It's the immediate human response.

One day there loomed upon the horizon a carpenter's son who went around from town to town preaching and teaching. People were quite intrigued by what he had to say, and properly so because they hadn't heard anything like he was telling them. As an example, he gave them a brand new concept of God....He painted God in pictures the like of which they had not thought of before. They were quite taken by this thought of God: -- a God of love and a God of power -- a God of grace and a God of goodness. It's always a deeply satisfying thing to have somebody tell you that somebody cares for you, and in this case Jesus Christ was telling them that it was God who cared for them. Well, they had no trouble subscribing to that notion, that was music to their ears.

But then when this wandering preacher kept talking in their midst, he began talking about them. He gave them some insights into human nature. He had gotten around quite a bit, of course he had, and on the basis of

what He had observed in human nature He gave them to understand that they were going about some things in the wrong way. He had seen people wreck their lives because they operated on a "tit-for-tat" philosophy. He had seen households broken because people had failed in their inter-personal relationships by reaching for a stone as soon as somebody had thrown a stone at them. So one day He was talking to them -- you can find it for yourself in the third chapter of the Gospel according to Mark -- as much as to say to them, "When will you ever get it through your thick heads that you can't fight evil with evil?" He phrased it in a classic expression by saying,

"How can Satan cast out Satan? - - "

...and that's the text for this sermon,

Mark 3, verse 23, and the sermon bears the title: "The Christian Technique."

...so for all of these years the world had been operating on the principle: "You hit me -- I'll hit you back!"eye-for-an-eye, tooth-for-a-tooth....

...and then the carpenter's son comes along and introduces the Christian technique and the Christian ethic, which is the principle of love.

But would you believe me when I tell you that I'm not so sure that people accepted it? I have reason to believe that after the preacher had left town, some codger might have gotten his family together and said, "Now I want to tell you something -- I have been thinking about this chap who came to town the other day. I have been reflecting upon what he said, and I don't want you kids to take him seriously. If you do, you'll grow

up to be a bunch of sissies, and no kid that bears my name is going to be a sissy! Do you actually realize what he was trying to tell us? -- remember now what he said: he said, if somebody hits you on one side of your face, you simply turn around and give him a chance to hit the other side!aw, no you don't!

...he said also something about, if somebody rips the cloak off of your shoulders, instead of getting mad at him, you just quietly and calmly take off your shirt, and say, 'here, take this too'aw, no!" -- said the old codger, " -- I'm not having any kid of mine grow up to be a sissy! You're to be every inch a man! If somebody socka you in the body, you sock him one back, and furthermore, if he looks like the kind of a fellow who is going to sock you, you sock him first!"

....I have reason to believe that there were people who reasoned that way after Jesus Christ came to town, because human nature being what it is isn't about to accept a principle or a technique by which evil can be outwitted.

So I suppose for the moment we have to ask ourselves two questions:

-- how much do we really want evil to be outwitted?

...and some of us very soberly will have to answer, well, not very much! -- especially if you are to judge us by the way we respond and the way we react. Any pastor who has been privileged to sit in the counseling room with people, if he dared, could parade in front of you any number of episodes how people have ruined their lives and their relationships because they did not first begin by saying to themselves, how can we lick the evil that is inherent in this situation? This was not their first concern.

Not infrequently the first concern is, not, What is right? but Who is right?

....so, you see, we think about our pride, and our pride has been hurt, and we nurse our wound, and we never get ourselves off dead-center.

We think of the principle to which we subscribe, and we believe so strongly in that principle that we can't brook any kind of opposition, and we're not about to give in and to give the other fellow the benefit of his point of view. So there we stand entrenched: this far we will go and no farther!

I say to you with all the strength of my soul, there are any number of marriages that could have been saved, I am reasonably certain of it -- if only people knew how to swallow their pride! There are any number of situations where inter-personal relationships are involved, where a better day could have come upon the horizon, if only one person involved would have said to himself, "Well, maybe I didn't gain my point -- so what!"

I'm numbered among those who admire with great respect the beloved Pope John XXIII -- as grand a man as God ever gave our century -- and I think specifically because he was the Pope with the pastor's heart, more so than any Pope that some of us have known in our lifetime. Pope John XXIII is supposed to have said, as he laid down a bit of a ground-rule for all the rest of us, "See a great deal.....correct a little.....and forget much." - - - an excellent prescription for improving human relationships.

Sometimes when pastors get together at a conference and they can lay bare their souls with their colleagues, they tell about the harm that's being done in the parishes that they serve by people whose feelings have

been hurt, or perhaps can't quite appreciate the new leadership and the good that could be done but it isn't done, by folks who refuse to play ball according to the new game and the new set-up.

I suppose one has to ask the question then: How much do you really want evil to be outwitted? And not very many of us are willing to sacrifice our hurt pride in order to keep evil on the run.

The second question that has to be answered is this:

Is the new technique, is the Christian strategy,
worth the risk?

...for it is a risk. You have no guarantee that you're going to be loved in return when you love! I suppose it would be a very easy thing to apply the Christian technique to our society if we were governed by Christian principles. Sure, if everybody is going to be kind to me, it's easy for me to be kind to them! That doesn't cause me any problem. But it's this blasé business of trying to love the unlovable and to like the unlikeable. That's where the difficulty sets in.

If you'll allow me to use the figure of speech, and I use it advisedly: God is the Great Gambler. Think of the risk He took when He gave us Jesus Christ -- when God was willing to risk Jesus Christ in our hands, and look what we did to Him! Love always involves a risk.

I can't give you the details....out in Ohio somewhere a woman rescued a dog that was in dire straits. She took the dog home, manipulated, maneuvered somehow, got him back in pretty good shape, only to have him bite her. And eventually she died from the wound....

Well, I'm willing to admit there are human curs -- there are people who bite the hand that feeds them -- there are people who exploit us in our goodness. But what's the alternative? Who wants to live in a world

where it's an eye-for-an-eye and a-tooth-for-a-tooth? Would you really want to live in a world like that?

The only reason why some of us are willing to go on living is because there are those who employ the Christian technique. Jesus Christ came and said: "Break the vicious cycle -- break it!"

And He did.

...and the more you think about it, the more you'll discover the uncanny wisdom that lies in his recommendation.

* * * *

(This ~~version~~ ^{sermon} transcribed as recorded)

"HOW TO FACE A PROBLEM"

GRACE, Mercy and peace from God
our Father and from His Son, Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

When it comes to reading the Bible, I suppose you can divide people into different categories. For our purpose this morning, let me suggest that we divide them into Category Number One: Those who read the Bible and believe in miracles; and Category Number Two: Those who read the Bible and do not believe in miracles.

I bring this to your attention because one of the three Lessons read in our service thus far is the Gospel Lesson for the Day. The Gospel Lesson for the Day is an account of a miracle performed by Jesus Christ. I find it rather intriguing, and I dare say fascinating, and I'm sorry for those who are turned off by the fact that it happens to be an account of a miracle. I'm sorry for people who don't believe in miracles -- they miss so much. Thomas Jefferson, bless his soul, with all his learning, third President of the United States, deist that he was -- he didn't believe in miracles. I have on one of the shelves in my study at the parsonage a very attractively-bound book -- it's the Bible, if you please, 'according to Thomas Jefferson.' For Jefferson, not believing in miracles, went through the Bible, presumably scissors in hand, and cut out all references to the supernatural....

...he believed in God. He believed in the teachings of God. But he just couldn't get around to believing in miracles. And you ought to know that this is the way his New Testament ends.....I think it reads something

like this, when it comes to the account of the life of Jesus Christ: "Then placed they the body of Jesus of Nazareth in the tomb, and put the stone at the door." Period.

...well, if you don't believe in miracles, you rule out the possibility of the Resurrection....

But I'm sorry for people who don't believe in miracles, for they allow themselves to be turned off, by truth inherent, even in the performance of the miracle itself.

We've always had a generation of people, you see, who have had to have everything explained to them, and who honestly believe that they must be able to appreciate and to ascertain the specific cause for every effect, and unless it's crystal clear to them, they rule out any further consideration of it.

I'm fascinated by this miracle account that we have in the Gospel Lesson for today, because it deals with people, it deals with meeting the needs of people. It brings to our attention the fact that there was a problem that had to be met, and if it's a title for this sermon that you want, how about trying this on for size: "How To Face A Problem." And the text -- it's the 5th verse of the 8th chapter of the Gospel according to Mark, the words of our Blessed Lord:

"How many loaves do you have?"

Now having said all of that, let me bring this to your attention, that each of us, no matter what his years may be, ought to keep a 'Notebook of the Soul'....and in that 'Notebook of the Soul' he ought to jot down from time to time the lessons that Life has taught him. For Life is the great

teacher.

Now how it may be with you I don't know, but in the 'Notebook of My Soul' one of the things that I keep jotting down is this:

We're never without a problem.

...whatever else I have learned so far in life, I have learned this, that as you pass from one stage to another you simply exchange one set of problems for another. Honestly now, this can be said.

I count it a great joy to spend some time with a little tyke of three years of age. He could hardly say the word, but it came out like this:

"I have a problem" -- a three-year-old!

...the great-grandmother of that three-year-old, with whom I talk every now and then -- she tells me about her problems....

At whatever stage you may be in life, there is always a problem at hand! We simply exchange one set for another! Because this is true, I invite your earnest attention to the sermon, because there are right ways and wrong ways in facing a problem.

Let me suggest to you that there are some people who are never aware of the fact that they have a problem on their hands, and this constitutes a problem for some of us -- trying to get them to see that they do have a problem! Significantly enough, in this case it was Jesus Christ who brought the problem to the attention of the people who were near Him. In case you missed it a bit while it was being read, let me refresh your memory.

This was the time of the great popularity of the preaching of Jesus Christ. Wherever He went, He drew crowds. He was the carpenter's-son-turned-preacher. And on this occasion, five thousand people were spell-bound by his preaching.....

...don't tell me people won't listen to a preacher. I get tired of my colleagues who excuse themselves and say, "But people are tired of preaching!" Oh, I'm not unmindful of the fact that there is always this cascade of words being thrown upon us time and again, and from many sources. But there are always those who will stop to pay attention to a man who believes what he is saying, to a man who has had a first-hand encounter with God and who speaks out of the crucible of his own experience....

I'm not so sure that people are tired of preaching....they're tired of poor preaching. And in the day of our Blessed Lord, they flocked to Jesus Christ because His preaching was fresh.

When He talked to them, God became very real. And in the reflection of God they saw themselves for what they were, and lo and behold, their fellow men came into proper focus. There was something refreshing, renewing, restoring, by the words that they heard come from His lips.

Well on this occasion they listened so well, mark you, that, talk about a miracle -- they forgot what time it was! They even forgot that they hadn't taken time out to eat! So Jesus Christ is aware of the fact that this is true....

...now, boys and girls, (present as a Sunday School class) there weren't any Junior Hot Shoppes close at hand...no McDonald's...no place where you could get a chunk of Kentucky fried chicken....

....it means they wouldn't be able to get anything to eat until they got all the way home. For some people that was a long, long way. So our Blessed Lord said to His disciples, "These people need to be fed." This is the problem: they need to be fed. God Himself takes the initiative to bring to their attention the problem that may be at hand.

Now, when the problem is brought to your attention, what do we do about it? Well there are certain ways to face it and certain ways we ought not to face it. There are some people, once they are made aware of a problem, do nothing but talk about the fact that there is a problem...and they get no farther. Back in my college days I used to enjoy talking to some of the students who were going into education. And I talked with them about their practice teaching down in the Borough of Selinsgrove. Part of their responsibility then was to come back from the classroom situation and go over certain problems that they had encountered with the professor in the Department of Education. It's a good thing that they were students in that day and age, because they tolerated that professor -- I'm not so sure that today's generation of students would have done it -- they would have torn him to bits. Because the poor chap, insensitive to what they had to experience, would invariably say to them when they would come to him, "Well, that is a problem, isn't it?"

-- that they knew already! They didn't have to have him underline it for them.

But for any number of people, that's just about the way it is -- aware of the problem, they keep repeating the fact: "I've got a problem....I've got a problem."

Then there is a second thing that can happen: when a person becomes aware of the fact that he has a problem, he may be challenged to examine his own resources. It's a good basic rule of therapy that eventually a man should see himself more a part of the answer than a part of the problem. So there are those who begin to take an inventory....and that's precisely what happened in this case. Jesus Christ said, "How many loaves do you have?" And they made the inventory. And one chap came up and said, We have so many loaves.

Now that's a wonderful thing -- to discover that you do have something. But the poor fellow spoiled it all by saying, "But it's not enough."....and then

there are people who face a problem in that way -- "The little that I have is so meager against the problem that's so great"....

...and then the lament begins all over again: "There isn't a thing that I can do about it because my resources are so limited."

But Jesus Christ kept staring in the eye the fellow who happened to be nearest at hand: "How many loaves do you have?"

"How many loaves do you have?"

--- "Take the inventory - - "

Then Jesus Christ said, "Bring them to me." Now that's the second thing that I can write down in the 'Notebook of My Soul.' The first thing is this: Life has taught me already that you'll never be without a problem. And the second thing is this: That God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is always waiting around somehow to show us how we can get a toe-hold on that problem -- trying to reveal to us some way by which we can get leverage. This I most certainly believe. So you have Jesus Christ saying, "Bring me the little that you have, and let's begin with that." And as soon as that happened, the miracle began to take shape. 1

I suppose at this point in the sermon I ought to invite our fellow member and friend, Joe Wiebush, to the pulpit. Joe, as some of you may know, is head of the Division of Chemistry in our Naval Academy at Annapolis. Because I'm quite interested in this part that I'm going to introduce into the sermon now....of all things, out in the Ozarks in Arkansas, a tiny village of 300 people, there's a Baptist preacher who has come up with a chemical solution which is being proven as a bona fide device in correcting the pollution problem in our automobiles. Can you imagine that! A number of years ago he was a student at the University of Arkansas. He took more than an ordinary interest

in chemistry. He never got it out of his system. In quite recent time he's been quite taken by the fact that this problem of pollution cannot be ignored any longer. Now, nobody asked him to do anything about it, and he might have reasoned within himself, 'But I'm only a poor beknighted Baptism preacher in the Ozarks, in a tiny insignificant village'.....but impressed by the fact that there was a problem, and he had just a little bit of learning, a little bit of knowledge, he began where he was. And the authorities tell us that his device is 50% more effective than what the manufacturers in Detroit have come up with this year!

What's the point in my telling you this? To face a problem you begin where you are with what you have. It' doesn't behoove any man to say he wishes he were somewhere else. You don't happen to be some else -- you happen to be where you are. The point to begin is where you are. And you begin with what you have. And I honestly believe that this good God of ours has always given us enough by which to begin!

Now you may say to yourself, I'm not an expert in pollution problems, I'm not a chemist. Alright, forget it for the moment. But let me tell you this: no matter where you are, you're surrounded by a multitude of people. This is the day of the multitude. You can't escape it. And around us on every hand are people who are going to faint by the wayside -- they're going to bog down before they finish their earthly pilgrimage. And in the meantime, God is saying to us: "What are you going to do about it? How much compassion, how much concern are you going to have for somebody else?" God has given every single one of us enough love by which to begin, where we are.....

...and the greatest problem in the world today is the lack of love. And you and I have enough with which to begin! where we are! And the little that we have, put into God's hand, becomes a lot! That's the way miracles are made!

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"AS LINKS IN THE CHAIN"
(Isaiah 45:5)

THE WORLD is so much with us, O God,
that we have so little time to do
this sort of thing, to allow the
mind to be quieted and the heart to
be hushed, that hopefully we might
give better attention to instruction
in Your Word. We'd be very happy if
that could happen right now, at this
time and in this place. Through
Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The title of the sermon about to be preached is simply "AS LINKS IN THE CHAIN OF GOD'S PURPOSE." And there is a text, it's the 5th verse of the prophecy of Isaiah, the 45th chapter no less. God is speaking to a non-believer. God has chosen His mouthpiece, Isaiah the prophet, to make the declaration.

For some of us it seems almost incredible that God would speak this way to somebody who doesn't know Him, to someone who has never claimed allegiance to Him. But there are many surprising things on the pages of the Good Book. Hear this: "I am the Lord, and there is none else; there is no God beside me. I girded you, even though you did not know me."

Now you won't forget what's already been said, will you? God, speaking through His mouthpiece, directs these words to a man who does not acknowledge God. God is saying to him: "I'm using you, and I'm giving you strength. I'm drawing you in My direction, and I'm putting you to work in my name."

...for that's specifically
what God did with Cyrus, the Persian king.

Archbishop William Temple, a name that you ought not to forget, was a great soul for Jesus Christ. He died, as some of us say, far before his time.

He had so much to give. He had already given so much. Archbishop William Temple very innocently observed on one occasion that God has a lot of other things in which He's interested besides religion. Now when Archbishop Temple said that, he shook up a lot of people, because they weren't quite willing to accept the concept that God does have a lot of other things in which He's interested besides religion.

For you see, whether we're willing to admit it or not, most of us limit God within sacred walls, or we're not about to accept anything, by way of pronouncement or program, unless it bears the imprimatur, a peculiar brand, a particular brand of people, known as ecclesiastics. Archbishop Temple said, and properly so, - - "God has a lot of other things in which He's interested, besides religion."

Now for those of us who read the Good Book, this really ought not to startle us, because that most beloved of all passages in the Bible -- the words will come to your lips immediately when I announce it as John 3:16 -- reminds us that God so loved the world.....

....the beginning verse of the Sacred Writing:

"In the beginning God created the world - - "

....this is His entire domain. And because God created the world and because God loves the world, that gives Him a far wider field in which to move around and operate than simply the confines that we give to Him within the limitations of an ecclesiastical structure.

Now having said all of this, and hopefully believing that you agree, let's move on now a bit farther, and admit that when God wants to get done what He wants to accomplish, He may not necessarily limit Himself to church people! If God has other interests besides religion, then He may have His moments when in order to get done what He has in mind He may use people other than those who are

within the church and the synagogue. Again I refer you to the Good Book -- when God saw fit to come uniquely, when God saw fit to give us His Blessed Son, our Lord and Saviour, He didn't turn to a priest, or a Levite....He didn't hang around the temple or the synagogue. He found His way into a carpenter's shop, and He came down with His full weight pressing upon the shoulder and the heart of a man named Joseph. And He said, "You're the man!"

....then He looked around for a peasant girl, a woman, perhaps, to whom very few people gave attention, and He said, "Mary!"

...later on we've said of her, "Blessed art thou among women! Blessed is the fruit of your womb!" -- ascribing great honor and praise to her.....not a Sunday School teacher....not a church deacon, not a priest, not a Levite. Now for some of us, who don clerical collars and ecclesiastical vestments, this is very properly unsettling and significantly disturbing. For some of us who read our Bibles regularly, for some of us who pray our prayers faithfully, for some of us who show up at church with commendable consistency -- this brings a good and proper jolt. But when God wanted to get something done as He had never worked before, He turned to a carpenter, and to a peasant girl.

Oh, and you're not forgetting, are you, when He began to corral the troops, and to gather faithful followers and to recruit men for the Kingdom, there again He didn't hang around the synagogue or the temple. He went down to the wharf, and He said to the fellow who was mending his tents, "You're the man!"

...He was walking down the street and He came to a man who was keeping books, a tax collector, and He said, "You're the one!"

Now granted they were faithful and devout, within their limitations, yet while they were to be found within the House of God, yet they were not members of a holy order. Well, this maybe you can accept without too much difficulty, because

they were still believers. But what are you going to do with this text for today's sermon? - - - God now goes deliberately outside the realm of those who recognize Him, He goes to Cyrus, the Persian king, not a believer.

Cyrus was quite a fellow, alright. He'd established quite a name for himself. And surely among all the tributes that were paid to him after his realm had been completed, they would never have singled out that he was the one who allowed the Jews to go back home. As far as the official chronicler was concerned, this was a very insignificant thing. But as far as the recorder of the Good Book is concerned, Isaiah, God's mouthpiece, is saying to Cyrus, the Persian king, "I'm using you! You don't know it, but you're going to accomplish my purpose." So Cyrus, the Persian king, said to the poor banighted Jews in captivity, for whatever may have been the reason that he saw, nonetheless in the sight of God---Cyrus, the Persian king says, "Why don't you go home! I'm giving you your chance to be free!" And so the poor banighted company of Jews, who had been in captivity, went back to Jerusalem.

Now again I say to you, God in order to accomplish His purpose, stretches out His hand now and touches a man who did not believe in Him, and who, it might be said, was not aware of the fact that he was a link in the chain of God's purpose! Now these things I can say to you: that God is ambitious, God is energetic, God has not turned His back against this world. God has any number of good things in mind for us. God's going to see that they get done! God's going to see that His purpose is accomplished. God, the undiscourageable one, is going to have His purpose accomplished in one way or another! And like as not, in order to get His purpose accomplished, He'll stretch forth His hand and reach for a human being, because God's preferred instrument is always a human being. In fact, I don't know of anything that God ever gets done -- significantly so, if one may use that characterization -- without using a human being. So God looks upon human

beings as instruments in His hand.

God uses people. And that's to be said in the better sense. And all of us alike are as instruments in His hand. Now an instrument is a tool, and a tool sometimes can be picked up and used -- it helps to accomplish a purpose -- then the tool can be put aside. And that's it! And may we not say that a tool may be completely unaware of the fact that it's being caught up, and making possible a very wonderful thing.

But God doesn't want us simply to be seen as tools. God doesn't want us simply to be seen as instruments. God, may His name be praised! wants us to be seen as partners, as people who make themselves available, as people who enter in to the performance of a deed, who delight in being part of it.

Now I must ask you the question: Are you a tool, or are you a partner? Annie King, bless her soul, about three hours ago got into that waiting taxicab over in Takoma Park, as she wanted to be here at church early and on time, to help open the doors.....and those of you who know Annie know very well that no sooner was she seated in the cab than she began talking up a storm. And her favorite conversation these days is the sad state of the world. And we can understand her great concern. The cab driver said to her, as he agreed with Annie, that the world is in a mess. In fact, said the cab driver, it's so bad that only the good God Himself can save it and set it straight.

.....I'm not so sure that the cab driver is absolutely correct. Oh, he's correct in saying that only God, as He gets involved, can get us out of the mess. But God, to get us out of this mess, will have to use us, - - - if His purpose is going to be accomplished, God has no hands except our hands, God has no feet except our feet - - God has no lips except our lips, if His work is to be done in the world today!

I don't have the words readily available for me, but my friend Alex

Dow could quote them for you, undoubtedly, about Antonio Stradavari, you know, who said something about when he takes his violin, and places it there to be played, even God cannot make Antonio Stradavari's violin without Antonio!

Now, my friend, some day it will be your lot, as it will be mine, to come to the end of an earthly pilgrimage. When that will be, neither of us knows. We only know it's inevitable. And it could well be that the angel of the Lord, standing there at the gate, at the threshold of Heaven, may say to us, among other things, ask a series of questions. And one of the questions that he might ask may be this: "What on earth were you doing?"

....I'll give you the cue to the perfect answer:

"I was about my Father's business."

...and that's what it means to be a partner, which is something more than being a tool.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son, Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Several episodes, if you please.

Episode #1 - - It was at this time of the year, 1517 -- is that the date? -- when that devout man of God, a good priest of the Roman Catholic Church, a learned professor at the University of Wittenberg, went to the door of the Castle Church, All Saints' Church, and posted there ninety-five things that he would be very happy to discuss with people....ninety-five things which he honestly believed, if they were frankly discussed on the basis of Scriptural truth, might bring about some honest changes in the Church of Jesus Christ which he dearly loved. That's Episode #1.

...and in that Episode #1 there were those who said what happened that night in Wittenberg left a repercussion which the Church of Jesus Christ continues to feel even to this very day....

Episode #2 - - Picture her, if you please, I find no fault with it, a little old lady, white-haired, in tennis shoes, getting special permission to enter a prison. She trips down the corridor and slips under the door of a cell a copy of the New Testament....she had heard that in that particular cell there was one of the worst criminals ever to be admitted in that jail in Tokyo. She says not so much as a word....trips lightly...goes away.

Before she got there, and after she was there, she turned frequently to God in prayer. The net result was that that hardened criminal gave his life to Jesus Christ because he happened to have read in the Book that she

left about Jesus Christ.

Episode #3, if you please -- Is it May 25, 1735, in Aldersgate Street Mission, at a quarter-to-nine -- when a devout priest of the Church of England, as he himself said, "found his heart strangely warmed" as somebody was standing up there in that meeting-place talking about something that he had read in the Scriptures, according to the interpretation of a man named Martin Luther.

In each instance the transformation of life and personality set in because somebody took seriously what the Holy Scriptures say.

There's a main thoroughfare that in Gettysburg National Cemetery that runs right through the campus of the Lutheran Theological Seminary. That means that the townspeople who go that way, and the tradesmen, and tourists in particular, take note of the statue that's near the Church of the Abiding Presence. It's a statue commemorating Martin Luther. Luther is seated, as was the custom of teachers in his day. Now to the best of my knowledge, anybody who knows anything at all about Martin Luther does not stop to ask as to what the book is that he has in his hand. They know full well that it's the copy of Sacred Scripture -- for you cannot separate the teacher from the text -- you cannot separate the Reformer from the Bible.

I submit to you that like as not, in any critical moment in history you'll always find a man with a book....

...as I told you before, you cannot separate Karl Marx from Das Capital....you cannot separate Augustine from the Confessions
you cannot separate Darwin from The Origin of the Species
you cannot separate the Apostle Paul from the New Testament....you cannot separate the Reformer from the Good Book...

~~Always at any critical moment looms the man on the horizon with the text in~~

his hands. We give credit on this day to those who have transformed the world of which they are part. We give credit to those who have transformed the Church of Jesus Christ and called it to renewal and to re-formation, because they were girded and sustained by the Scriptures.

For anyone who knows anything at all about the life of Martin Luther -- priest, professor that he was, he had that period in his life when he was without any peace of soul. Even when he stood before the altar celebrating Mass, he trembled because he could not honestly believe that God could forgive him his sins. He knew peace only after he wrestled with the Scriptures, and the Scriptures () him and brought him the peace of God that passeth all understanding....so much so that Martin Luther could refer to the Scriptures saying, "The Scriptures bring us to Jesus Christ."

There is another Episode to which your attention must now be called. There was a Col. Chapman who had charge of a contingent of prisoners during World War II who were confined to one of the islands in the South Seas. Recognizing the sad state of the men under his charge, for whom he continued to have responsibility, he believed something had to be done to help occupy their time and boost their morale. Whether it was his suggestion or not, I can't tell you, or whose suggestion it might have been -- somebody said, "Why don't we spend our time reading the Bible?"

...well no doubt there were those in that group who had decided at one time if they ever had time they would read the Bible. Well now they had time. So they began reading the Bible, began reading it together. They never finished reading the Scriptures. Somewhere, somehow along the line they lost interest and put the Bible aside.

Still believing that their time had to be occupied somehow, one day somebody brought forth a copy of the Oxford Dictionary....so somebody said,

"Let's study the dictionary, word by word." Would you believe me when I tell you that they were absolutely fascinated and intrigued in their word study? -- the like of which they never gave to the study of the Bible.

Now my question to you....on this day when we recognize our debt to the Reformers and based what they did upon Scriptures....on this day when we recognize the transforming touch which comes to the Scriptures, I have to ask you: If this is the way we feel about the Bible, why do we find ourselves, like as not, in the company of those prisoners on an island in the South Seas? We have a measure of respect for it, but when it comes to sticking with it and reading it earnestly and diligently, we may lose interest.

In the personal interviews that I have with the confirmands at Bethany, I talk with them about some of the things I honestly believe have helped me to grow as a Christian. I talk about three things in particular, and one is reading the Bible consistently, and I suggest to them that they may want to do it, and even give them a readable copy of the New Testament. And quite frequently, I must tell you, I draw a blank on their faces, because they just can't quite picture themselves each day spending a portion of time doing nothing but reading the Bible. And yet they're wonderful kids, and with all the ardor of my soul I give them credit for wanting to be confirmed in the Christian faith.

Well, I'll shift gears for the moment and I'll talk about you. I'm reasonably certain that you respect the Scriptures, and in every single home that's represented here now there is a copy of the Bible. And it could be that for 75% of you, you have a Bible on the bed-stand -- within reach. I think this could be said. Yet if I were to take a poll right now, and say, "Will you please stand, those of you who have already on this day read a

chapter in the Bible" - - - some of you might never again come back to Church.

By the same token, if I were to suggest that maybe we might ask the question: How many of you spend as much time reading the Bible as you give to reading the sports page in the daily newspaper?...the editorial page.... ..the financial page? I would hope that you do read these pages, I would not fault you at all. But as one who stands with the Good Book in front of him Sunday by Sunday, as one who is in duty bound to root and ground all that he preaches and teaches according to sacred writ, as one who once took a promise that as a minister of the Lutheran Church he would preach and teach the Word of God ---- I am in duty bound to bring to your attention the desirability and the necessity to read the Scriptures.

But I have been in the ministry long enough and I've rubbed shoulders with you long enough to know that it isn't that you don't cherish the Bible. But the fact remains that you may not read it as much as you should, and myself as well. Could there be reasons why this should be so?

Somebody has advanced the reason that we don't read the Bible because it's a very somber-looking volume. So often it's printed in forbidding black. Maybe if we printed the Bible in more attractive colors people might be more induced to reach for it.....

...well, the American Bible Society has heard you. And if you ever visit the headquarters of the American Bible Society in New York you'd be thrilled by the way the Bible is now being printed in attractive colors....

....the very lovely and gracious lady who conducted the devotions for us when we had fellowship suppers reached for a Bible in the Office of Youth Ministry. She couldn't believe herself that it

was a Bible, because when I go up there, my eye falls upon a particular shelf that the Assistant Pastor has up there, with the series of New Testaments -- attractively bound -- with very clever photographs on the inside, and the pages read like paragraphs in a book, not so much split up, you see, with these difficult verses.

Do you think people read the Bible more frequently now because it comes colorfully bound, attractively prepared in an interesting format? Two members of this congregation have become instrumental in getting attractive Bibles, 6500 in number -- they're going to make them available for free distribution through the Gideons at Montgomery College. It could be that because they have an attractive format, that they might be read.

There are some people who say we don't read the Bible because we haven't time. But we sleep. And we eat. And we see that certain things that we want to do get done.....

....There are some people who admit that they don't read the Bible because they're not much interested in the things that happened four thousand years ago, two thousand years ago. Well maybe they could build a case there because they tell us that for the first time we have a generation of young people who are hard-pressed to have any kind of an appreciation for a sense of history.....because right now they're growing up at a time when the immediate is always upon us. Who has time to think about the War Between the States? -- when practically every news report now is talking about what's happening in Southeast Asia? We're constantly being bombarded by what's happening now that we have little time to think about what happened two thousand years ago. And yet the great purpose of history is to serve as teacher.

.....Some people honestly admit that they don't read the Bible because

they've lost interest in God. God no longer is a formidable factor in their lives. That would be a sad thing to have to admit, yet whether we admit it or not, maybe that's the reason why many of us don't read the Bible, because unconsciously they've, we've lost interest in God. It's this interest bit, you see.

Whenever I go back to the parsonage about the time the postman has come, I discover that Winifred has gathered the mail up and put it on the stereo there in the hall. I'm quite honest with you when I say that the first mail that I look for, as I separate it, you see, is a letter from Jon, our son who lives in Brooklyn. I have a close relationship with the writer of that letter, you see -- I'm quite eager to hear what he wants to say, what may be of concern to me because it's of concern to him....

...there are six of us who grew up in our family. My sister Helen is the only one who does any letter-writing in the family, so when I get a letter from Helen it's quite an event in my life and I am eager to read it because I have a close relationship with these five people....I'm quite interested in knowing what they're thinking and what they're doing. And quite frequently what they're thinking and doing to this very day has some influence on my life.

Could it be that if you and I recognized the fact that we still have a relationship with God and God still has a relationship with us, and through the Scriptures God's trying to get some message across to us, God's trying to tell us something -- it could be that we might reach for our Bibles more frequently, if we kept fresh the recognition of the fact that God's still thinking about us....God still has something to say to us.

The Apostle Paul, who loved the Scriptures and helped write them, once wrote to a young man by the name of Timothy, in the 3rd chapter of his 2nd

Letter, the 16th verse, how he ought to recognize what Scripture is. He says, it's inspired by God....it's profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training and righteousness. He was talking about the Bible -- the book that Bruce Barton said, a number of years ago, is the book that everybody owns, nobody reads.....

...that's a terrible note on which to
end this sermon.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)